

## SAY HELLO TO THE REST OF US

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 1 | Aired on 09.07.2008

*Strange Love* - Vampires, they exist. Psychic waitresses, they are adorable. Sassy black sidekicks, they may or may not have anything else happening. Naked Jason Stackhouse?

Sure, the books are cute, who doesn't like the books? (My favorite part of the books so far are the lack of skin-sparkles and spine-devouring devil-babies with retarded names.) I mean, the books would make a great show on TNT or A&E, like, my understanding of *The Closer* is that it seems to be about a woman totally engulfed by her troubling relationship with food, but who is secretly the most manipulative person on the planet, attended by six or seven dwarves, who are policemen by day. (...Am I even close?)

That sounds like wacky good fun, and I've always kind of assumed that would be the model for the Sookie Books. And then sliding toward edgier, Lord knows I adore *The Cleaner* and *Saving Grace* (besides *Mad Men* they're all I've really been watching), because basically I'll watch anything where people do a whole bunch of drugs and a whole bunch of fucking, and then have long conversations with God while solving crimes. That is *so* the best job. That would have been a fine match. The Sookie Books are mysteries, right? Do some fucking, snort some V blood, do heinous shit/solve a crime, be adorable and quirky and psychic. Easy.

Except this show didn't get made for TNT or A&E. So the whole character-centric, client-based formulaic fun goes out the window. *This* show got made for HBO, by Alan Ball, a man whose relationship with the zeitgeist is not unlike that of *The Closer*'s with food, *Grace*'s with scary sex, or Da Bratt with sobering people up. Which is to say, Alan Ball is so very much about the issues of the day that he's managed to grab hold of a concept that *literally stands in for all issues simultaneously*. Which is... the opposite of a dick move, as it turns out. It's actually fucking brilliant.

Because the show asks the same question as the books -- *What if vampires...?* -- and then answers it about fifty different extra ways. The books are about Sookie, but the show steps away from Sookie, which means you get to actually see what things are like for people who are not Sookie, so every scene in the entire first episode just keeps asking this question -- *What if vampires..., what do you do?* -- over and over and over, and every single scene answers it differently. So like, what does unshielded psychic waitress Sookie Stackhouse do? Wait for two years after the vampires' official simulcasted "coming out of the coffin" to see one up close, and spend that time getting more and more adorable. And when she does find one, his mind is closed to her. For a show -- and a trope -- that's all about penetration and interpenetration, whose teeth are where, whose mind's inside whose, that's a powerful aphrodisiac. She's spent her life hearing the beast in every man: why not choose the one monster whose beast she can't see? Plus, he's like soooo übercute.

And what does violently sexy brother Jason do? Well, that should be clear if you've ever seen a queer movie in your life: act totally gay-bashy about them while simultaneously focusing with laser-like sexual intensity on them and what they do in bed exactly, and then getting any vicarious hit he can off it. The sex part, actually seeing it happen in all its grotesque biological glory, seems to have really scandalized some early viewers, but I don't know. It's not particularly titillating, that's for sure. And it seems obviously played to a specific note

that has more to do with Jason's body sending out certain unexpected signals that make him wary of himself, which is just one way we do this. Our era is such that a huge part of this kind of cultural change would be sexual in nature, because we are right now allowed to experiment with our bodies more fluidly than ever. He's the fetishizing-the-Other viewpoint here, so it's good that he looks so excellent naked, because mainly what he's going to be doing, apparently, is: Be Naked. Oh, and framed as a serial killer. A Naked one.

And what does the town's former Other -- a makeup wearing, hard-as-nails gender-nonspecific fry cook named Lafayette -- do about the vampires? Um, nothing really. He's too busy trying not to get his own ass murdered while holding down what seems to be 11 jobs, by my count, and simultaneously uttering witchy, wise, harsh and strange advice. For a character I was pretty sure was going to push every button I have, he sure did become amazing in about two seconds. He's like if every weird character from Shakespeare had a very skinny, very violent and sexually aggressive baby.

How about Sookie's sweet old Grandmother? She just giggles and nudges her granddaughter to ask the vamp out, because she's seen it all before. And the guy at the liquor store, he's all set to pretend to be a vampire just to fuck with normals, until he does it in front of a very unamused real one. What does the town whore do? Get caught up in a web of very spooky demon sex that ends in her murder. What does the best friend do? Act like a dick and whine a lot. I don't like her too much yet. What do the town meth addicts do? What addicts do best, which is do whatever's most brutal and nasty in order to get the best hit for the best dime -- which in this world includes chaining vamps down and draining their blood for dope. And what does Sookie's gorgeous boss Sam -- who is, of course, deeply and secretly smitten with her -- think about all this? Trust me when I say he's got his own shit to deal with.

I mean, we'll see what happens. Ball's giving all the right answers, Paquin has now slid 95% of the way across the bar from Cute to Hot, the vampires are all awesome so far (and will be including [the Sexiest Man in Sweden](#) by the end of this month)... Mostly I just like the idea: What do you do? What would you do? Now, of all times, I'm excited about watching the story of people who are present for a cultural change of sweeping intensity. Terrifying -- the apocalypse always is -- potentially gratifying, certainly edifying. This is a story about *the moment everything changes*. Now's the time.

I keep thinking about my grandmother -- or yours -- and how one day, maybe she was sitting on the porch or behind the wheel, and she saw a man and a woman together, with skin colors that didn't match. And their baby between them, toddling along, and maybe in this hypothetical Poitier moment she didn't have the software to process it: Babies are awesome and cute, but hate is this whole other thing, which may or may not even apply, but they don't really belong together, but too late for that now, but what's the kid going to grow up having tooooooooooooooo10010101010011. Not "good"/"bad", not "hate"/"tolerance", but something much more human: *I don't have the fucking software for this downloaded into my head yet. Please be kind to me for as long as it takes.*

So what do you do? Sex, either as a means to absorb the other or to be subsumed by it. Death/immortality: the two biggest opposites we've got. Freedom from illness/enslavement to hunger. Pain/pleasure, wisdom/addiction, euphoria/degradation. Escape/control, power/submission. You're on there somewhere, I'm on there, there's something there for everybody, because it's not really about what the vampires *are*, right,

like their themness, because they've got it under control: they've been vampiring around behind your back forever. It's about what happens to *us* when things change, which is really the only story there ever is. Because, sorry, what happens to Sookie when things finally change is ... very simple: she falls in love, she saves her man, she gets the ever-loving shit kicked out of her.

And I mean, not to knock it, but: wouldn't you rather watch something like that than *Kyra, The Vampire Closer*? Even if things get do a little porny now and then?

See what creator [Alan Ball had to say about the new series](#). And check out our list of [TV's sexiest vampires](#).

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Oh, Kelly and Brad, you madcap couple of swamp rats. Let me ask you a question: how come the trashy-slutty-country vibe makes women look worse and men look hotter? Is it like age, like some kind of cultural misogyny where Sean Connery's ancient dick is still appealing to people, but Helen Hunt became disgusting when she turned 35? Is this fear of pussy talking? Are slutty country girls, in fact, hot and I just don't know it? And if so, is it because they -- like Kelly -- are willing to drive down the highway with one hand on the wheel and the other one around Brad's dick? Even though he is snoring and asleep? She says it's because she's bored, and he notes that she gets bored pretty easy, then lays back for his handjob. He's just getting into it when he sees the sign for a roadside gas station -- WE HAVE TRU BLOOD -- and squeals for her to stop.

Inside, Nan Flanagan is explaining for the umpteenth time to Bill Maher that, as citizens who pay taxes, her people deserve basic civil rights like everyone else. "Yeah, but... Come on. Doesn't your race have a rather sordid history of exploiting and feeding off innocent people? For centuries?" Is she a Republican? She looks kind of like a Republican. "Three points: Number one, show me documentation. It doesn't exist. Number two, doesn't your race have a history of exploitation? We never owned slaves, Bill, or detonated nuclear weapons." That's so human, like how if you kill one guy you're a murderer but if you kill a thousand you're a hero: vampires kill in a way that's way too intimate for Americans to handle, because intimacy is not something Americans can handle. "You blew up Japan." "Yeah, well you killed a dude in 1895, and it was really dark outside."

The guy operating the gas station this late at night has long lank hair, so black it's gotta be dyed, to match his gothy boots and intensely douchey silver jewelry: pentagrams, five rings on every finger, upside-down crucifix, etc. That was so sad when this guy got beat up every day of his entire childhood, but at least he had the shadows into which he could retreat. And look at him now: proving to everybody that being a self-conscious overdramatic weirdo is its own reward. Working the graveyard shift at a gas station is totally sticking it to the man, Ponytail.

"And most importantly, point number three: Now that the Japanese have perfected synthetic blood which satisfies our nutritional needs, there is no reason for anyone to fear us. I can assure you that every member of our community is now drinking synthetic blood." The only other guy in there is good old boy, whistling at the beer cooler, as Nan goes on: "That's why we decided to make our existence known. We just want to be part of mainstream society." On the screen the cheering and applause erupt; Brad and Kelly come in laughing, drunk.

"Y'all have Tru Blood! For real!" giggles Kelly, and Brad asks if there are even vampires in Louisiana. The guy puts on an obviously ridiculous Transylschpoovian accent and stares them down: "You didn't know that New Orleans is a Mecca for the vampire?" Brad can't believe it: New Orleans vampires would have drowned in Katrina, because they couldn't get out, because nobody got out, because FEMA is a joke. "Vampires cannot drown... Because we do not breathe." He bares fangs at them and they shrink back; over at the beer cooler the good old boy is none too happy either. Brad swears they didn't mean any harm: "We're just a little drunk." Gothtard is like, that's awesome because I can get drunk while I'm fanging you, and then stares at them with what I imagine is an eldritch fire in his eyes.

"Score! I totally had you guys!" He laughs, but Kelly's not too happy about it. Brad agrees with the guy that it was actually pretty funny, and then the NRA guy comes walking up to the counter to disagree. "What? We don't care what you think," Brad snorts, rolling his eyes at the counter guy, and asking if he knows where they can score some V-Juice. Kelly's grossed out, but the shop guy asks how much they're looking for. "I knew a girl who knew this girl who did vamp blood during Greek Week," protests Kelly. "She, like, clawed her own face off." Urban legends about legends -- that is truly hot. Brad swears he can pay good money and the good old boy tells them to leave immediately, having had enough of their shit.

I like that V-Juice, based on the people we see involved in its use and manufacture, seems to be akin to crystal meth in that it's nasty and classless and cheap and trashy. I love that, because it goes to an "I don't care where it comes from or what it's doing to me, I just want more" place. (Only instead of making gross trash look grosser and trashier, like meth does, it makes you some kind of dang superhero.)

"All right, fuck you, Billy Bob," says Brad, having had enough of the dude's interruptions. Then things become awesome as he turns from a silly old thing to a hot trucker dude from a pornographic cinema film: "Fuck me? I'll fuck you, boy. I'll fuck you, and then I'll eat you." His fangs pop out and they run off, and meanwhile the loser behind the counter shits a brick. Billy Bob drops a sixer of Tru Blood on the counter and explains that if the guy pretends to be a vampire again, he will be eaten. Gothbag nods and shivers and whatever, and Billy Bob smiles wide: "Have a nice day now."

Credits: Swamp, scary trees, scary houses, scary church, scary church people, Selma, a rattlesnake, little kids eating raw meat with blood all over their faces, naked ladies in their underwear, road kill, KKK kiddies, a church-type sign reading GOD HATES FANGS, heh. Sexy girls dancing with sexy boys, sexy boys with sexy boys, a fox rotting, random bodies in random combinations, people praying like lunatics, nature being totally amazing, a barfight, the rapture of God, strippers, baptism at night. Yeah, that about covers it. "When you walked in, the air went out... I wanna do bad things to you." As much as I love the song and opening intro, which accomplishes what it sets out to accomplish if nothing else, I have to say my favorite part about all this is never having to see Brad and Kelly again. We live in hope.

Sookie Stackhouse is beautiful and tiny and blonde and psychic and looks much like a grownup. She takes a tray out to the tables at Merlotte's, a bar somewhere near a road but

not really a city. Back in the kitchen, Lafayette's at the grill flirting with Big John, who flirts right back. She can't hear them; she's too busy trying not to listen to everybody else thinking. One large guy sits sadly at a table in the center of the place, guilty and staring down at the table. *Just let me have just one beer tonight, Jesus. One beer, that's all I need. And if you just give me the strength to say no to beer number two, then I swear...* Sookie puts down his first beer of the night and just keeps walking. Much as I would, were I Jesus and somebody said shit to me.

Scary fat lady shovels French fries into her face (1) and thinks about killing her man (2) if he disapproves (3) of her self-medicating with French fries (4), especially after what she did for him (5) last night in the bedroom, which by the way was disgusting (6), although she kinda liked it (7). Problems with scary fat lady, from where I'm standing: Seven. I count seven. Sookie's feet barely touch the floor, she's in such a hurry to get past this table full of, coincidentally, all the very things that make me want to protect the institution of marriage with everything I've got.

Gay kid staring at his parents: *Who are these people? And what the hell is this music? I feel like I'm trapped in some hillbilly's OxyContin nightmare. I cannot wait to get the hell out of this podunk town.* Sookie loses composure with this little space dog transmission from the Flying Dutchman and nods at him sharply: "Make sure you do, and before it's too late, because every year you wait, you just get more and more stuck here. Believe me, I know." Gay kid predictably freaks and wonders if she can hear his thoughts -- just in case we were confused -- and she fidgets and runs off to get them ketchup. The voices close in, and finally get so loud that she must stop, in the middle of the floor, and breathe, quiet them, and continue on. If Sookie Stackhouse doesn't do at least three *very dramatic/off-kilter things* in the middle of Merlotte's each episode, how will people remember to think she's retarded?

-- Page 4 --

At the Super Sav-A-Bunch, her best friend Tara is sitting in a picnic display fold-up chair, reading *Shock Doctrine* and swinging her legs. Without looking up, she welcomes her visitor to the store, and goes back to her book. The visitor in question is a giant lady like in Harry Potter whose knees are where your head probably is when standing erect, and -- like *Dexter* -- what she wants most is some of "that thick, translucent plastic sheeting, the kind they hang in front of the doors of walk-in refrigerators." Without looking up, Tara notifies her that they don't sell that at the SSAB, and to try Home Depot. Which, of course, is what happened to the woman only backwards, and she's getting frustrated. "Awww," is Tara's hilariously not-unsympathetic response, but she still doesn't look up. "Now, I cannot believe you don't have that stuff. I don't even know what it's called... You're supposed to have everything!"

(And frankly, I'm kind of on Tara's side in this one particular instance, because: the conversation is over. "Do you have this?" *No I do not. Thank you for asking.* What's left to talk about? "But I thought you would have this." And yet I do not. "But I wanted you to have this." I love you so much that I also wish that we had it, but no. "But my plan was that you had it." And now we see that your plan has gone awry. What in the fuck do you actually want from me? "For you to go back in time in your time machine and have the thing that I want." Okay, since time machines do not exist, what would be the second thing, on the list of all the things I can do for you at this time?)

"Well, we don't have that stuff that you don't even know what it's called," Tara says, for the umpteenth time, because that's all there is to say, because the woman needs to stop. "Your website says that this is the most well-stocked store in five parishes. Now, I just drove over an hour from Marthaville..." Tara finally stands up, because the lady is not going to stop. This is not like the greatest customer service in the world, but on the other hand, what are you supposed to do? Cry with the lady about the unnamed plastic stuff? Because the lady's not going to cry, she's just going to keep asking if you have it until she gets the answer that she wants, which is the opposite of reality, because that's what this lady is all about. And plus, having seen Prior Tara in the original pilot, this Tara is like one thousand times easier to take anyway. I don't approve of the shit that she does, but of the conservatively ... *ten?* ... asshole things she does in this episode, I'm pretty much with her on this one. And the next one. "Does our website have a phone number?" Giant Lady supposes that yes, it does. "So it never occurred to you, before you drove an hour, to pick up the phone and call us, to see if we stocked whatever the hell it is that you're looking for?"

-- Page 5 --

No. Because SSAB chooses to classify itself as a store that has *things*, I guess, and misrepresented itself by not having this *particular* thing, which is a problem for Giant Lady, but now -- because she's having What Is trouble -- has also become Tara's problem. Say hello to the rest of us, Giant Lady, and welcome to a world without plastic murder sheeting. You have now created two problems. "Why didn't you just find it online and have it delivered to your house? Or were you just looking for an excuse to wear them ugly-ass clothes?" (I grant you that this is a bridge too far, but also, why are you still up my ass, Giant Lady? Go about your business!) Giant Lady in Giant Ugly Ass Clothes stares at her, and asks to speak to Tara's manager. Tara immediately acquiesces and screams a name (Raymond? Something Cajun I don't know?) and the manager looks up in total fear of her bullshit.

"Trust me, you are not gettin' me fired. I am quittin'. You were just the fuckin' catalyst, and for that, I ought to thank you." I love that, "You are the catalyst for all the hell I will now unleash." The lady tells her she's a very rude young woman (she is) but Tara replies that she's not being rude, she's being "uppy." Which is kind of great because firstly, who wouldn't love to act out like this, and secondly, the last thing Tara is interested in being is a sassy Southern black chick, and what better way to demonstrate how shitty people are for putting her in that box than by saying, "This is the box that you put me in."

I can't very well be making my only decisions or have an opinion that matters, because there's an *us* and a *them* and because of the amount of melanin in my skin, of all things, I'm a *them* and I always will be, and you need to somehow understand that this is retarded. It's not possible for me to be "rude," because that implies a choice: I'm being "uppy," because I resist the box that I'm in. One sassy black chick cannot tell another sassy black chick that she's being "uppy," without irony, for the same reason that 1 white person using the n-word will always > n sassy black chicks saying honky or cracker, or 1 man saying "bitch" > 1,000,000,000 women saying anything at all. By the same token, if Tara weren't black she'd just find something else. Maybe feminism, or whatever the thing was she happened to be, because if you want to talk about the terrors of intimacy, let's start with Tara. What makes it interesting is that she does have the black thing to use, and has no problem using it, and that's yucky to think about, which is what she's forcing you to do, which is -- for a woman -- being a bitch, and -- for a black person -- being uppy.

-- Page 6 --

How uppity? Slapping the manager right in his fucking face amount of uppity, for quote "pattin' my ass too much." And again: there's your resignation, over and out. Except that Tara's kind of an asshole, and kind of too angry to think logically, and kind of deserves to be that angry, all the time: "I'm a get my babydaddy, who just got out of prison, to come and kick your teeth in." *Do you get it yet? The person on the other side of this, talking?* Nope. The manager starts shivering and begging for his life or whatever, and she just snorts mirthlessly. "Oh my God, I'm not serious, you pathetic racist. I don't have a baby." They stare at her, uncomprehending; they see the box quite clearly, but not the girl inside. "Damn. I know y'all have to be stupid, but do you have to be that stupid? Shit." She shoves past the Giant Lady: "Fuck this job."

Sam Merlotte -- gorgeous, earnest, unshaven, clearly in love with his employee Sookie -- answers the phone, super friendly; he hands it over to Sookie, who apologizes for getting calls at work. Sam says that it's okay, because at least she doesn't abuse the privilege like Arlene (an older, rougher, red-headed single mom) does, but what he means is, I looooove you. "This had better be an emergency," Sookie says, and Tara immediately comes clean about quitting her job: "I can't work for assholes." Sookie commends her on being so independently wealthy that she thinks she has a choice, "Miss Say-Hello-To-The-Rest-Of-Us," and Tara reminds her that Sam is not an asshole, and is additionally in love with her, so how would Sookie even know. Sookie is scandalized, to the point where Tara laughs at her. "Jesus. Look, you need to lighten up." Sookie hisses at her, admonishing her for use of "the J word," heh, and Tara says she's coming to the bar for a margarita. When she hangs up, she hangs her head, low, against the steering wheel.

Dawn, the younger hotter other waitress at Merlotte's, warns Sookie that Mack and Denise Rattray are just about to sit in her section. Sookie looks, just as Mack's slapping Dawn's white-trash skanky ass and she responds with a hearty "What the fuck?" Ew, these people. Sam mutters to Sookie to stay strong, and calls her chère. Mack's thoughts are as follows: he would like something from the menu that will give him the runs, he would like Sookie to wrap her "sweet lips" around his "slim reaper," and then also to "hop aboard the Mack express" and "ride all the way to heaven." So that's what Mack is like, in addition to being totally creepy and gross to look at. Meanwhile, Denise asks in her slowest short-bus voice for onion rings, with mustard, while thinking about how Sookie's "pathetic, like a dog that's been kicked too many times, and keeps coming back for more." Sookie smiles at them and takes the hell off. "I think she's retarded," Denise surmises as she walks away.

-- Page 7 --

We haven't met Rene yet, but he also hangs at/possibly works at Merlotte's -- he's the hot one with the wild Cajun accent and bizarre facial hair -- and is dating Arlene. True to Sam's complaint, Arlene is now on a personal call: "Honey, if Rene tells you you're too young to watch a scary movie on HBO, then I'm siding with him. I know he's not your daddy, but your daddy does not wanna live with us anymore. Remember?" Sam grunts at her to get off the phone, while Lafayette dances awesomely at the grill. Sookie asks him for Denise's onion rings, making it clear that he can abuse them in whatever way he likes before they are served. He finally looks up and notices that she's wearing makeup, and goes into a whole routine about how she looks like a porn star, with her tan and pink lipstick. She's confused by all this, but explains gamely: "When I wear makeup, I get bigger tips." Lafayette shimmies in a full-body understanding of the importance of packaging. "And I get even bigger tips when I act like I don't have a brain in my head. But if I don't, they're all scared of me."

Lafayette explains that it's not Sookie they're afraid of, "honey child," it's what's between her legs. Sookie is once again scandalized, hilariously: "Lafayette. That's nasty talk, I won't listen to that!" Arlene laughs and asks if he's even aware of what's between a woman's legs, but he's being serious. And he should know, with his eye makeup and cargo kilt and all the prancing, because homophobia is really just misogyny using a different passport: "I know every man, whether straight, gay, or George motherfuckin' Bush, is terrified of the pussy." Sookie screams some more, but he's not wrong.

He's just not telling the whole story, which is exactly one lifetime long, about where we come from and where we're going and all the things we do to one another in the meantime. If somebody like Sookie were in town, the fear of her mind wouldn't be that different from fear of her body, because either way it involves extinguishment, lack of personal will, loss of control, topsy-turvy social order. The ego can't acknowledge the difference between sex and death because either way it's not in control, and the ego can't imagine situations where that's the case. Sex means no control, so all we do is try and control sex. Our bodies and everybody else's. Where the binary -- and Lafayette's little speech -- fall apart is that women come equipped with the same fear, because we all come from the same place, because no woman was ever born of man except Athena, and she was even worse about this stuff. Which is why women have historically signed on for the fact that if it's men making the rules, that means controlling women. Fear of pussy = fear of vampires = fear of Sookie = fear of Lafayette, and the story here is about the way we're stuck to our fears like magnets, attracted and repulsed, unable to see the world as it really is. So listen again, because Lafayette is saying, "Being afraid of sex is being afraid of life," and Sookie's saying right back: "STOP TALKING ABOUT SEX."

-- Page 8 --

"Listen," Arlene tells Lafayette seriously, "Not everybody is gay, okay? Not everybody wants to have sex with you." But Lafayette knows the shadow, it's where he lives, and all he will say -- making mystic signs in the air with his hands -- is that she'd be surprised, and that includes people she knows. Dawn and Arlene agree that certainly *they* don't want to have sex with Lafayette, and he puts on an elaborate show of fucking the grill with his six-gear hips. Dawn slaps her ass as she's walking away, teasing him; Arlene cups and massages her breasts. He answers her "peaches & cream" with a "little cocoa" of his own, they all sing along, they all dance and laugh along, Big John's still laughing at Lafayette's antics, and this is how they get along. This is how they acknowledge and transcend, because they're grownups; Lafayette radicalizes gender because he has to, which radicalizes sexuality for everybody, and this is the dance they all do. Except Sookie: Sookie flees.

But sexuality doesn't automatically make you a grownup, and involving yourself with the pussy even on a regular basis doesn't mean you're not afraid of what it means: it just means you're putting it outside yourself, where you can look at it. Most of the reason high school is hell is because of this: your body going crazy at the same rate you start being interested in the mystery and the terror of pussy, which is why teenage boys are gross and constantly trying to get a look at it or taste it or stick their fingers in it, and why girls get eating disorders. "Okay, you've sufficiently investigated our vaginas to your satisfaction and have the map to the thing, the scary place, the undiscovered country. You've solved the mystery. Now how about you say hello to the rest of us?"

Maudette Pickens is watching some douchetard on *Blind Date*, who says he's got "a little bit of an edge" and gets in fights all the time, whilst looking like the last fight he had was with a

Level 12 Half-Orc or something, and Maudette finally comes. Sookie's brother, hottie Jason Stackhouse, appears between her thighs, and they kiss. He notices a tiny pair of marks, little kisses on her thigh, and gets scared. "What the fuck is this?" Maudette's embarrassed, scratching at her marks, pretending they're mosquito bites. Soon enough she gives in, and admits she fucked a vampire once. "I went to that vampire bar, down in Shreveport. Look. I was broke and he paid me a lot of money." Jason rises, and sits on the ottoman: "You a hooker, Maudette? Because I don't pay for it. Never have, never will." She smiles, a little afraid he's turned off, but loving the creepy mystery of it all. "I don't charge for it, neither. He offered me a thousand dollars to bite me. What was I gonna do, say no to a thousand bucks?" Jason, hypnotized and disgusted and intrigued, asks what it was like, and for a second she's back there. She shivers and deals with it, and admits that it was scary. (Which: very scary. Although not quite as scary in the final edit, because let me tell you the original scariness gave me the screamin' meemies.)

-- Page 9 --

Jason grins conspiratorially, like children talking about sex, and says he read in *Hustler* that everybody should have sex with a vampire at least once before they die. Maudette assures him once is precisely as many times as is necessary. "He was way too rough. I mean, I like to be rough sometimes, but..." Jason takes the bait and asks the requested question: "You like it rough?" She says yes: "It's not like it's gonna kill me. And if it does, well, then I won't care, will I?" Even Jason is weirded out by this fucked-up reply and starts looking for his pants, because one thing you don't do with a person who hasn't dealt with a nasty sexual history is adding to it. Desperately, she speaks up: "I videotaped it. With the vampire." She runs her hands lightly along his naked thighs and asks if he wants to watch. Of course he does: he's an investigator of these things. It's how he solves the equation, it's how he's done his whole life. He grins and tosses his pants aside again.

Sookie drops her tray on the bar near Tara, whose life sucks. She reminds her friend not to be feeling sorry for herself -- "That's just lazy!" -- and Tara wonders aloud why she can't keep a job. Sookie offers that perhaps it's because she can't keep her mouth shut, and Tara calls her a bitch. They laugh. Sam asks how Sookie's night's going, and offers to improve it for her, with a bit of a glimmer in his eye. She stares at him, completely innocently just as she intends, and eventually he is embarrassed. She doesn't even notice, though, because she's hearing something that isn't there.

A piano plays across the scene, as a man enters Merlotte's and sits down in a booth. He finally turns and looks at her, and they stare at each other. This is the heir of Compton, vampire at large, powerful and magical and every bit as courtly and anachronistic as Sookie's own *Alice In Wonderland/Little House On The Prairie* combo of blunt pragmatism and Miss Manners etiquette. She's a little afraid of the sudden silence; he senses it and raises his head and she squeals to Sam and Tara, delighted. "Oh my God! I think Merlotte's just got its first vampire!" Sam agrees, hackles raised, and Tara stares distrustfully. Sookie's happier than we've seen her.

In every man there is a beast, and she can hear him, speaking softly, adding a blade's edge to every kind word and a thrust to every caress. Sookie's the Final Girl, the virgin trope, but not because it's a useful cliché, or because it's one more way to control the pussy. Sookie's a virgin because men are disgusting, and because none of us can tell all the stories inside of us, because we hide the ugliest bits even though they are the loudest. Men, sex, love were

created to break her heart. And now she's the happiest she's ever been, because there's a hole in the world.

-- Page 10 --

But why wouldn't she be? To know you are a monster, alone in the world, was bad. Knowing there were vampires out there -- who penetrate because they lose control; who must rein in their natural abilities in order to fit in -- made it better. But this is best. (It's like the whole *The Little Mermaid* thing: sexist or not? The movie I mean, not the real story: Ariel loved humans and human things before she met her prince, because she felt alone. The prince was a side effect of her loneliness; maybe that's how love always starts, simply by telling us we don't have to be alone.) The idea of vampires -- of the unnatural intersecting comfortably with the world that fears her -- has been a comfort for two years; she's about to meet her people.

"Can you believe it? Right here, in Bon Temps? I've been waiting for this since they came out of the coffin two years ago!" She fairly prances over to him, order slip in hand, as Sam sighs. Sookie tries to take the vamp's order, constantly fading out and smiling hilariously, too excited to say anything at all, shaking her head and fading out again. "Do you have any of that synthetic bottled blood?" She talks around her huge grin, explaining that Sam ordered some a year ago, but then no vampires ever showed, so it went bad. He smiles at her and she leans closer: "You're our first. *Vampire*," she whispers, in case he thought she meant some other intrinsic quality about him that made him interesting and special and caused her to act all squirrelly. "You're the first person I've met that wore black shoes and a brown belt together. I am going to call my Grandma immediately and tell her."

He asks if it's obvious, and she smiles: "I knew the minute you came in. Can't believe nobody else around here seems to." Except Sam, the vampire notes, but she brushes that off. "He's cool. I know for a fact he supports the Vampire Rights Amendment." Fangster flirts about how progressive of Sam that is, and they look at each other for awhile. He doesn't eat or drink actual things, but orders a glass of red wine, to "have a reason to be here." Sookie giggles that she doesn't care what the reason is, she's just glad he's here. Mack Rattray, from the booth behind him, says not to worry about Sookie: "She's crazy as a bedbug." Sookie shoots his trashy ass a death look and heads out for his wine. Mack drops some seductive fangbanger threesome swinger creepiness into his native creepiness and introduces Denise, who acts all horny and shit. The impassive vampire tells them "Good evenin'" without even turning around.

-- Page 11 --

Jason stares at the screen: a muscled tall guy, bald head, yucky tattoo of a beetle skeleton crawling from his medulla oblongata down the length of his back. The vampire has Maudette's hands chained above her head, to a hook hanging from the ceiling; he's screwing her standing, from behind, while on the couch she goes down on Jason. He doesn't take his eyes off the screen until his head falls back against the couch: directly above him is the hook. On the screen, the vamp growls right into the camera and goes scary-wild on her, making a sound like an espresso machine.

Sookie stares at the vampire, now sitting with the Rattrays; Denise's arm around him as she slouches drunkenly in the booth. "What a ... bitch. You really think that she's gonna let him bite her?" Tara asks if this is one of those Sookie things, essentially: "You know how many

people are having sex with vampires these days? Sometimes those people disappear..." Sookie assures her that he's not like that, and Tara indulges her for the five seconds she spoke to him. "You ignore how many people he sucked the blood out over the last however many centuries he's been alive." Sookie's entranced: he's just not that scary. He's a guy. Tara employs the J word again, but Sookie doesn't even notice: "Yeah, but the synthetic blood has everything..." Sam interrupts and makes a very, very good point. "Are you willing to pass up all your favorite foods and spend the rest of your life drinking Slim-Fast?"

Over in the booth, the Rattrays are totally acting like meth heads. Denise is going on and on about how she's always been discriminated against, because she "never felt like being what society wanted [her] to be," and Mack's babbling, backing her up after every phrase without really saying anything, drumming his fingers on the back of the booth seat, horny or hungry. Sookie interrupts to ask if they want anything else, and this is what Denise is thinking: *Not that big, he's probably got eleven or twelve pints in him. Holy shit, that's almost two hundred ounces! I bet we could get five hundred an ounce in Dallas... Fuck me, that's \$10,000.* Sweet Jesus. Stalling for time, Sookie offers to bring them a free round; Mack's thoughts are unkind as she whirls away again, ordering them not to go anywhere. Sookie has three walks: regular A-to-B, tiny little trip-trops, and sexy high heel swagger. I love Anna Paquin because: Sookie has three walks.

Sookie runs up to Tara near the bar, begging her to help save the vampire from the white trash crackheads; Tara swears that they will not be involving themselves in this drama: "We don't have to get anywhere near that vampire." Sookie -- I love everything Sookie says, always -- solemnly informs Tara that she is "very disappointed," Tara due to her "small-mindedness." Sam arrives to once again tell her that the vampire can take care of himself, but Sookie feels it before she sees it: she turns to stare at the empty booth, his untouched wine. "Shit," she blurts, and heads off running without a second thought -- Sam follows, tossing his apron at unemployed, drunk Tara and telling her to take care of things -- but out in the parking lot, it takes Sookie a sec to locate their minds. *Look at this,* Denise is thinking. *This is so thick. Damn, this is gonna bring a pretty penny. We should keep some for ourselves... Although if Mac freaks out on me again, I am so through with him...* Sookie runs into the woods, stopping only to grab a heavy length of chain from a truck bed.

-- Page 12 --

Jason's got Maudette tied up for the investigation, hanging from the ceiling by her wrists, fucking her from behind. "You like this? Being punished? You're a sick -- little -- vampire -- fucker. You like that, Pickens?" The camera trails along her bookshelf, reflecting their bodies: prom pictures, those creepy baby statues, all the bits of a life, and finally a video camera, taping the whole thing. "Come on. You look at me. You let a dead man fuck you? Fuckin' disgust me. It's too bad I don't have fangs, huh? Rip your fuckin' throat out." He wraps his hands around her throat as he goes. Safety first, people. If you're gonna bone the town slut, at least have a safeword.

The vampire awakes, pinned to the ground with a delicate silver chain laid across his wrists and neck. I like that. The vampire has black hair and sad eyes. The Rattrays bitch at each other over his body, waiting for his blood to finish draining. Why are they doing this out in the middle of everything? No time to wait: "I just need some V-juice. I need it bad. My body is starting to hurt and I just need to get it in me." Denise notes that her husband is a drug addict, which should have been obvious if they'd just looked in the mirror back at their trailer. Sookie sneaks up behind Mack and bashes him with the chain just as he's

telling Denise about how when she talks, all he hears is "a-yada-yada-yada," and he goes down. He pulls out a knife to cut her up with, and she tosses the chain around his neck as the vampire stares.

The chain moves of itself, like a coiling snake, pulling tighter around his neck. He falls. "This ain't your business, you stupid cunt," says Denise, which Sookie -- now holding a knife in addition to her *Carrie* shit that just showed up -- takes the c-word as proof of "how low-rent" Denise really is, and there's some of this "do you know who you are dealing with" kind of talk, and the whole time the chain is still quite actively choking Mack to death. Sookie tells Denise, voice shaking, that she's not worried about being on Denise's bad side because that's all Denise has, being "no-account, backwoods trash," and Denise -- not interested in getting into hand-to-hand with a knife-wielding telepathic retard -- goes for the bags of V-Juice instead, but Sookie warns her off. Denise promises to kill Sookie for interrupting their little murder and beating up her husband, whatever, and she drags him away. He still can't get the chain off, but her hateful monologue is pretty funny: "Come on, Mac. This ain't over. Come on. Get up, Mack. Why can't you take that fuckin' thing off? I ain't got time for a fuckin' cripple, because I'm getting out of here one way or the other." And the whole time Mack's just grunting and screeching like crazy. It's satisfying like on *Intervention* when they cry.

-- Page 13 --

I like that it was a big industrial steel chain that Sookie used, because of the funny inequality it sets up against the tiny chain of silver, which wouldn't work on the opposite men in the quartet. Hit the vampire with a big old chain and he's going to eat your face; drape jewelry across Mack Rattray and probably same thing. We have our weaknesses and we have our inversions; there's no stronger or weaker, nor good or evil, just ways of being what God made you. Sookie peels the chain slowly away from his skin; it smokes, and takes skin with it. He'd groan more if he hadn't been bled so intensely. As her journey across his body frees his chest, he immediately puts his fangs away. Right this second is the hottest Bill is in the entire episode, and I am not even interested in investigating why that is. The scars and lesions on his wrists and chest instantly heal right before your eyes; Sookie whispers: "Shut. Up." She drags the vampire out of the way as Denise drives their trashy pickup toward them, shouting about how "I'm going to get you bitch" and things of this nature. I wish the Rattrays would instantly die because I cannot handle these people at all. And it's not like it's bad writing, because the hate I feel for them is ever so real.

Sookie considers the vamp. "Oh, bless your heart. I am so sorry I didn't get here faster. You'll be okay in a minute, right?" He stares around, and looks back up at her; she's confused. "Do you want me to leave?" He says he doesn't, and she smiles sweetly -- girl is crushing hardcore -- but it quickly falls: "They might come back, and I can't fight yet." (But also we are in true love! I am the answer to all your questions!)

A mysterious cute doggy comes running up out of nowhere to bark at the vampire ("Stop being sexy and mysterious!") and give Sookie a good licking. She giggles and he runs off after yelling at the fang some more. "He's checkin' on you," the vampire offers, but that's silly! Doggies don't patrol for ladies of virtue in trouble, silly vampire. "That's just some old dog that hangs around the bar sometimes, he must live nearby." The vampire nods indulgently; she tries to help him up and he shrinks back, still healing. "I reckon you're not too happy about being rescued by a woman." He brushes himself off, staying out, and remembers to thank her. She reaches out, in the silence, listening for him as hard as she can;

he pulls the tourniquets from his arms and she listens, but hears nothing. "I can't hear you," she says wonderingly, now convinced it's not a trick of the light. "Thank you," he hilariously reiterates, but she kneels and puts her hands on his cold face, looking into his eyes. "No, no, no. I can hear you, but I can't..." She gauges the depths, sounds the dark, measures the silence. It goes on forever. "Oh, my stars..."

-- Page 14 --

He doesn't like it. Being stared at, being sounded. "Aren't you afraid to be out here alone with a hungry vampire?" Her answer is a simple "no." He points out that, colloquially, "vampires often turn on those who trust them," because they don't have "human values." She grins, because nobody turns on each other like humans, with their values. She wraps the silver chain around her neck, like a scarf, and finds his eyes again: "I'm not a total fool." The vamp pushes it, trying to get back control of the situation, find that easy sexy intimidation that's gotten him through the last few centuries; the sex beast that's given men the upper hand since people were invented: "But you have other very juicy arteries," he says, eyes traveling. "There's one in the groin that's a particular favorite of mine..." More Sookie greatness follows. "Just shut your nasty mouth, mister. You might be a vampire, but when you talk to me, you will talk to me like the lady that I am." The vampire is undone, charmed, defeated, impressed. She's of him, of his people: courtly and rulebound.

The vampire sits back and offers her the blood the Rattrays drained off him, which of course disgusts her totally. "I understand it makes humans feel more healthy. Improves their sex life." She assures him she's healthy as a horse, "And I have no sex life to speak of, so..." He meets her eyes, just the tiniest glint of laughter behind them, and her eyes slide away. She laughs at herself, caught in a game she's never played before. He offers she could sell it, now that it's drained, and she swears she'd never touch it. Suddenly, he is next to her, staring into her eyes, afraid of what she is and the mystery she holds: "What are you?" he asks, in a new voice. She shrinks back. "Well, I'm... I'm Sookie Stackhouse. And I'm a waitress." Still a bit wary, but polite as ever, she asks his name. It is Bill. She cracks up, never dropping his gaze. "Bill? I thought it might be Antoine, or Basil, or... Or, heh... or like Langford, maybe. Vampire Bill. Oh, my." He's none too impressed, so she changes the subject again. "So. Silver, huh? I thought that only affected werewolves..." (Was that racist? Is she calling him a mythical thing and otherizing him or something? What are the rules? She starts to stutter.) "I... I... I'm not implying that werewolves exist." (He grins, as though they totally do and he knows it.) "I mean, that's just what you always see in the movies."

Bill nods at her, inclining his head seriously, manipulatively, telling her in word and manner that she is now a part of the elite, responsible, special. A very special girl. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't share this information with anyone. We don't like for our weaknesses to be made public knowledge." She nods seriously, worthy of this secret, and puts her hair absent-mindedly behind the ear. She stands slowly, and he stands with her, and she excuses herself to go back to work. Walking away, smiling to herself and at herself, glorying in the silence, loosing the silver cord from her throat. He stands in the darkness; he watches her go into the light.

-- Page 15 --

Sookie Stackhouse, you are a charmer! Sam's standing outside the bar when she returns, obviously concerned for her welfare. Her smile and posture are the self-satisfaction of a girl in love. "I'm fine. And for your information, not all vampires can take care of themselves."

She breezes past him, back to work, and he stares out into the night like he can smell something coming. For the record, of the three major hotties of the show, I have to say Sam's my favorite. Once Eric shows up in a month, everything is going to go nuts, but for now: Team Merlotte all the way. Mutual adoration is really the only relationship I can manage to deal with, with my employers; anything else is too complicated. Plus, dude is fine and gets zero credit.

End of the shift; Arlene says an easy goodnight to Sam and Tara before heading home. Foremost on Tara's mind is how much she's getting paid for the twenty minutes of work she put in, and Sam offers her twenty bucks. "Sam! How do you expect me to work here for twenty bucks a night?" He points out the million different ways of disaster even saying it aloud implies: "-- It'd be a matter of time before you went off on somebody. I don't wanna drive my customers away." Tara protests that she only goes off on stupid people, and Sam hilariously reminds her that the majority of his customers are stupid people. She presses, in a way that's not even really pushing or manipulating or untrue, but insincere nonetheless: "Yeah, but... I could help you keep an eye on Sookie. You see the way she was looking at that vampire? That is just trouble looking for a place to happen. And she means too much to both of us to let anything happen to her." Sam is, of course, immediately defeated. He hands her a bartender's guide and tells her to report back at six. "I was mixing whiskey sours for my mama when I was in first grade," Tara assures him. "It's just like riding a bicycle." They agree that this is a fucked up thing to have be true in one's life.

Jason enters, and Tara goes through an immediate and dramatic change; she lights up like spring just came to Bon Temps and she's a lovely flower. Sam tells him Sookie's gone home already. Jason's distracted and weirded out; the last time we saw him he was impersonating a vampire while roughly fucking and strangling the town whore, so probably he just needs a hug from somebody who won't fuck him; that person is clearly not Tara. She gets in his face, of course: "Uh, my name is Tara? Been your sister's best friend since kindergarten? I used to sleep over at your house for, like, years?" He blows her off and says he knows her; she snaps that he better. He just kind of shrugs, like, "Um, okay," and drinks his beer and tries to avoid the weird aversive lasers shooting at him from all of her body simultaneously. Dawn, the youngest of the waitresses, is somebody Jason used to date. They sniff around each other; she says she's not mad at him for not calling because he's Jason Stackhouse, on whom no woman puts expectations. "I'm not a idiot," she [sic]s, (and Tara quite strongly begs to differ, behind the bar), and Jason basically makes a boning request. She laughs and tells him she's going home, and he laughs too, loving it. "Oh, my God. You are a gigantic parody of yourself and you don't even know it." He tells her it's great seeing her, and wishes her luck (for what?) and then chases Dawn into the night. "Good luck? Good luck with what? ...Shit." I know, girl.

-- Page 16 --

Sookie arrives at home, her grandmother Adele's house. Flies cover the screens, buzzing in your ear, as she watches through the window. "Guess what happened tonight?" she asks her grandmother, who takes a moment answering. "...You got a date!" Sookie makes a hilarious face -- um, no? -- and gets excited all over again. "A vampire came into the bar." Adele gives a half-hearted but participatory squeal, like she's just heard a story about a mouse that was in the kitchen once, and asks if the vampire had fangs. "Yeah, but most of the time they stayed put away." She asks if he bit anybody, and Sookie says he just ordered wine. "I think he just wanted some company," Sookie says, and Adele seizes on the obvious truth. "Did you like him?" Sookie allows as how he was "...real interesting," and Adele

stares her the fuck down. Oh, that grandma look. I miss it. She kisses Adele's cheek -- is her grandma reading a Sookie Stackhouse Southern Vampire novel by Charlaine Harris? Because that will really give her a leg up -- and heads off to bed, calling Tina, the cat. Adele giggles as the cat runs across the kitchen table, instead of punching it in its little kitty cat face like I would. That shit is gross.

Tina purrs as Sookie sleeps; she arises to a breeze at the curtains, and sees him down in the garden, staring up. She pulls on a short, fleecy robe and runs out into the night; she can't feel him anywhere in the yard, and suddenly he's there, behind her. She gasps and whirls, says hello, and he immediately starts to take off his shirt. Not so courtly, but certainly not a problem. "I never thought I would be having sex with you. At least..." She opens her robe slowly, speaking in a dreamy singsong: "Not so fast." Bill asks, "Who said anything about sex?" The fangs come out, and he licks them slowly; she wakes up gasping, smiles at herself, embarrassed, and falls back...

Into a deck chair, in her bathing suit, next morning. Jason drives his truck up and runs over to her, all abuzz: "How come you didn't tell me you beat up the Rattrays last night?" I love that line. She points out they haven't seen each other since then, and tells him to be quiet about the whole Sookie The White Trash Slayer deal -- Gran's hanging laundry out back. "Fortenberry couldn't wait till I got to work this morning to tell me all about it." Hoyt Fortenberry? That's the one (he's the other cute townie type that isn't Rene.) "How the heck does he know?" When Hoyt went to the Rats' last night to buy some weed, and Denise was just driving up all fast and pissed and nutty, and made Hoyt drive Mack to the hospital in Monroe. Sookie finally sits up, because what is more awesome of a morning than finding out you put a motherfucker in the hospital?

-- Page 17 --

"Uh huh. Did Hoyt tell you that Mack came after me with a knife?" Nope. Jason shifts into big brother mode: "Motherfucker. You want me to kick his ass?" Sookie, most excellently, reminds her brother she already covered that particular box on the Bingo card when she stomped the shit out of his windpipe with magic powers. "What are you doing messing with him anyway?" She informs Jason that, in addition to being disgusting trashy drug-dealers, they're also vampire drainers. "One of my customers last night was a vampire, and they were draining him out in the parking lot. I couldn't have that."

The reason I love these little "this is the way things go" speeches she's always giving is because every single person on this earth has to come up with a moral structure by which to live his or her life. Even the Rattrays and the vampires have rules, even if they're destructive or ignorant or whatever. Usually they come from somewhere, usually they come from somewhere stupid and received-wisdom oriented and lazy and we live our lives afraid of everything in the world because we're not sure what to feel guilty about. But some of us, the best of us I think, manage to think their way there on their own, by looking logically at the world and their place in it, and acting accordingly. Sookie has had to come up with a really good set of principles that proceed entirely from the very specific tragedies and triumphs and capabilities of her particular existence: We don't talk about sex, because if we did we'd never stop; we don't let bad things go down if we can stop them, because that shit gets in your head. I love Sookie's ethics because they are totally categorical -- besides taking her superior abilities into account -- which frankly means that if we all followed them we'd all be okay, which is my favorite sort. People were doing bad shit, she wasn't having that on her watch, so she fucked them up. Little Sookie Stackhouse.

"Sookie. You do not want to get mixed up with vampires, trust me." She tells Jason to shut up, and points out the logic: "Even if you hate vampires, you can't let trash like the Rats go and drain them. It's not like siphoning gas out of a car. They would have left him in the woods to die." Which would not bother Jason in the slightest: "He's *already dead!*" Sookie protests that it's not his fault, and Jason gets a new, terrifying idea. "What did he look like?" ("Handsome, in a sort of... Sort of old-fashioned, like from a movie on TCM.") "Was he bald-headed?" No: "He had really nice hair." Any tattoos? Sookie giggles to herself about how she hasn't seen any tattoos yet, and Adele comes sweeping in before Jason can bug her about their storylines possibly connecting. Adele makes tea and lunch.

-- Page 18 --

Later, at the kitchen table, Jason teases his sister, spearing food off her plate and chewing it quickly: "If you're gonna wear that suit, you might want to start watching what you eat." She stares at him and he grins rakishly. "You look nice." Adele comes running in, doing a perfect "Southern grandmother with intensely gruesome gossip, which is Christmas for Southern ladies," having just heard that Maudette Pickens was found in her apartment ... strangled to death. Hmm. "She didn't show up for work, wasn't answering her phone. And so her boss called Bud Dearborne, he rode over, got the manager to let him in, and they found her." Sookie is shocked; having gone to high school with old Pickens. "Can you believe it?" Adele delights: "A murder in Bon Temps!"

Jason's not surprised, since A) he's a racist and B) it's important that we talk about how vampires killed Maudette Pickens as loudly and as often as possible. Sookie says that just because somebody died right around the time a vampire showed up in town doesn't necessarily mean he's a murderer. "Oh come on, fangbangers go missing all the time, in Shreveport, New Orleans... They never find them, but everybody knows the vampires are killing them and then disposing of the bodies." Sookie is put into the queasy position of defining "fangbanger" for her grandmother without alluding the whole sex thing, and Sookie is shocked to learn that there was anything interesting about Maudette, and asks how he knows this about her. Jason suddenly bashes his fist on the table and raises his voice: "I don't know, Sookie. The way that you just know things sometimes?" She's hurt and thrown -- whenever anybody mentions her psychic powers, pretend they're saying, "That totally giant mole on your face" -- and Adele looks away.

Jason stands at the sink, apology in his voice, and changes the subject to something related, but a bit further from the murder he may have committed: "There's also hookers who specialize in vampires. They drink Tru Blood to keep their supply up, and they keep a bodyguard there in case the vamp gets a little too frisky. ...I read that in a magazine." Adele wonders how much the fangbanger whores cost, and he immediately says it's a thousand bucks. Sookie's grossed out, and Adele agrees, because what kind of self-respecting lady would do that, but Sookie, hilariously, shakes her head: "No, it makes me sick that they're getting a thousand bucks to lay there and do nothing while I bust my ass for ten bucks an hour plus tips." Jason laughs and says they're "supposed to, you know, *participate*." Sookie squeals and he grins, loving that he's freaking her out, but after a moment his smile fades. He goes dark, and she tries to listen in, to reach him. He makes haste for the door, thanking Gran for lunch and saying goodbye, but she comes around on him, putting her hands on his face. (*This can't be happening to me! How could I lose control like that? How come she...*), but he pushes her off. "Don't try that with me, goddamn it! I'm your brother!" He heads to work, Sookie worries some more.

At the worksite, Jason's still not feeling normal enough. He wants something normal, to tell him that he's okay, and for Jason that means sex. Dawn's shaving her legs on the side of the tub when he calls, and she teases him a while before inviting him over. Seeing the cop cars coming for him, he hangs up and yells a friendly hello. It's Sheriff Bud Dearborn, a jerk, and Andy Bellefleur, a detective. Jason slaps Andy on the shoulder; Lafayette watches from afar. I love how Lafayette works everywhere in the entire world -- because I love Lafayette -- but I think that if you had beef with Lafayette, you would not go places very often. So Andy and Bud do the whole thing where like, "Do you know Maudette?" No, but okay yes, "Do you go over there?" No, but okay except for last night, "Do you fuck Maudette?" No, but yes, "Did you know she was killed?" No, but wait yes, my Gran just told me that, "Why are you lying about everything?" So you won't think I killed her, "But like obviously now we do, so say goodbye to your little friends." Well played, Stackhouse. Hoyt and Rene and Lafayette watch, worried, as they put Jason in the car and take him away.

Sookie's putting on her makeup -- her face, to hide who she is; the costume, to help her remember to be stupid -- when Adele enters. "I was just wondering how old you think the vampire is. The one you met last night." Why? "You think he might remember the War?" As in, the Civil War? That's awesome. "If he does, I would love to have him come speak to the Descendants of the Glorious Dead. You think he might want to?" Sookie points out that Bill Compton -- a vampire -- might have difficulties showing up at the public library come Thursday noon. Gran suggests a special meeting at night, or a one-on-one in which she could "tape his recollections." She laughs loudly with the joy of her idea: "I am sure the other members would find it so interesting!" They giggle, and Sookie kisses her cheek, promising to try. Should she ever see Bill again, which of course she's going to.

Hoyt, Rene and Arlene are hanging out at Merlotte's; Tara's sitting at the bar reading a book as a large bubba customer approaches from the front and Lafayette approaches from the back, excitedly: "Hey, hooker! How you doing, what are you doing here?" He has real trouble believing she works there ("The hell you don't") and she returns the serve: "Oh yes the hell I do too, you ugly bitch. You need to make peace with that." Okay, for some reason watching them bitch each other out is the most charming thing so far in this show. How -- how -- is Lafayette so awesome? If you made a list of things I can't deal with and then crushed that list into a fine paste and made it into a person it would be this person, and yet? I think it's the actor, in great part, but also the way the character's written, he's like this ... serious force, at the middle of the storm, issuing these statements and things and still being a person. The whole Kenneth Anger component is heightened when he's around, even just chatting. "Shit. Sam must have lost his damn mind, because you should not be allowed to work in no situation where you actually got to interact with people." Oh, and BTW? Lafayette is punctuating every line in this entire scene by pouring straight vodka into his coffee mug, swigging it, and pouring it again; also, trying to fuck the good old boy across the bar without actually touching him.

The dude finally snaps at her, fed up with waiting on her rude ass. And, of course, she erupts. "Do... Do not snap at me. I have a name. And that name is Tara. And isn't that funny? Black girl being named after a plantation? [He laughs, of course, because that's what white people do in this instance.] No I don't think it's funny at all, in fact, it really pisses me off that my mama was either stupid or just plain mean -- which is why you better be nice if you

plan on getting a drink tonight." He apologizes, calling her "ma'am," and they go back to their conversation. Lafayette asks if Sookie knows about Jason yet, but Tara didn't even know yet, so Lafayette pours another shot for the betrayal of confidences and total incoming drama. "Are you serious? Jason couldn't kill anybody. And he can do a hell of a lot better than Maudette Pickens." Lafayette laughs at her and her enduring crush, which she denies, calling him stuck-up. "That boy is sex on a stick," Lafayette says. I don't give a good damn how stuck-up he is." Bubba at the bar shrinks back, and Lafayette stares him down -- which, if you're into these big trucker guys like certain people I myself know, is a pretty good specimen: "How you doin'?" Tara calls him out for -- and she would know -- "scaring that white boy," but Lafayette knows the game even better than she does. "Ain't nobody scaring him, he's too big to be scared. I like a big man. Look at that belly. Dance all over your ... You can be my Santa Claus." He heads back to the kitchen to fry things, tossing back a hilariously off-the-cuff "I'm in the phone book!" 5:3 it works. Just saying.

In back, Sookie's wiggling about the arrest. Lafayette sympathizes quietly -- When are we going to see these two interact? I bet it's awesome/unexpected -- and Sookie gets stuck on how everybody knew but her. Dawn admits that she only knows because she was complaining to Arlene about getting dogged by Stackhouse once again, meaning Arlene knew thanks to Rene. "Besides, we figured you'd just..." Sookie wheels -- *the giant mole on my face?* -- and they trail off, embarrassed. Dawn asks, if we acknowledge the mole as a given, wouldn't she still just ... psychically know? Thanks to the mole we don't talk about? Sookie, awesomely and literally, runs screaming from the room. "I AM NOT PSYCHIC!"

She runs to the pool table, where Arlene's hanging with Hoyt and Rene; Arlene is frigging drunk as hell and talking in a hilarious loopy weird voice. "I cannot believe I am here on my night off, just pouring my hard-earned money back into Sam Merlotte's pocket!" Sookie interrupts her incipient alcoholism to ask about Jason, and all three of them get hangdog. Rene says -- and this doesn't add to the recap, but I love when he talks -- "Hell. I promised him I wasn't going to tell ya, you." Hoyt explains about the questioning and how suddenly Bud and Andy just threw him in the car. Which, Sookie points out, means they don't even know if he's technically arrested, and Rene acknowledges that he wasn't cuffed. Arlene gets soppy sad on Sookie's behalf -- I think I love Arlene -- but Sookie's like, "Y'all are already acting like Jason's been convicted of killing Maudette. We don't even know what they were talking to him about." Hoyt, sweetly, says that this is because Jason is a "standup guy." Once again, Sookie draws the line between sentiment and actuality: "No, he's not, Hoyt. He is selfish, egotistical, and a complete horndog. But he is not a killer." Hoyt's sad, but she's not listening to him. She's listening to something that suddenly isn't there.

-- Page 21 --

He's there. She turns and they focus entirely on each other. Everyone in the bar, the couple at the table behind them, every single person, stares. Tara slowly shakes her head (*Now just look at that, like she's walking down the aisle on her goddamn wedding day, which is what it's like. Sookie honey, just 'cause...*) Sam fairly shivers (*He's got her in his sights. I need to protect her... Sookie, please do not...*) Some scary Jesus lady's lips get all thin (*That's that vampire she saved last night...*) Bill does something almost like smiling. "Good evening, Miss Stackhouse." An old man gets smaller, in the corner (*Ain't right, him being here with normal people. She's going to sit...*) Jesus Lady can't take her eyes off it (*I always thought she was nice, but I just wonder what kind of a good Christian girl would even look at a vampire...*) A biker shivers (*I don't think he looks that kind of scary to me...*) They blend together, in her mind, getting louder as she nears the silence (*Looks like she likes 'em tall dark and dead... Stackhouse*

*family ain't nothing but trash...) He puts out his hand, and she takes it. She closes her eyes, in love with silence. She comes back to herself. That's what love does too.*

"Your hand is cool," she says, like it's the deepest thought ever thunk. He looks away. "Yes, uh... I'm afraid I'm not as warm as the men that you must be accustomed to." She laughs, because what men, and he looks sharply back at her face. She remembers herself, pulls back from it like heat, pained face at having to go back, to the clash and cry: "What can I get for you tonight?" *What are you?* he asks again, and she swears she's just a waitress. "No, you're something more than that. You're something more than human." She begs him to stop, with her eyes: don't talk about the mole. Don't put me down where you are. Who knew not being alone meant joining others? "Sookie. That's an unusual name, Sookie. Is it short for something else?" She swallows, begging him with her eyes to stop being weird and start being her boyfriend. "Nope. Just plain Sookie." Nothing extra, nothing scary, nothing for this moment other than what you want. Just give me the silence.

"...May I call on you sometime?" Nice. That's even too oldschool for Sookie. "May I come and visit with you, at your home?" She's like, *hell yeah*: "My grandmother would love to meet you. Oh, that reminds me, can I talk to you after work? I have a favor to ask you." Bill galls a bit at the reminder; favors and loans: "After all, I am in your debt..." She laughs and clarifies that it's a *favor* for Adele, and something different for her. "If you'll be up... Well. I guess you will be." She laughs, and he smiles. "Would you mind meeting me around the back of the bar when I get off at... probably around one thirty?" He'd be delighted. She smiles at him.

-- Page 22 --

"Do you realize that every person in this establishment is staring at us right now?" And they are, among them Sam and Tara. (The music at this point, by the way, becomes totally amazing. Most TV shows written by gay guys, they do the whole romantic performance while everybody stares thing *once*. We are getting more than our money's worth.) "Oh, they're just staring at me because my brother's in some kind of trouble with the police." She thinks. "Bill, did you know Maudette Pickens?" He doesn't, wrong vamp and wrong story; they lean closer toward each other. "They are staring at us because I am a vampire. And you are mortal." She speaks to his lips, to his mouth: "Who cares what they think?" Bill does: he's returning home to Bon Temps after hundreds of years. She closes her eyes and nods. "Right." He leaves, promising to return at one thirty, and she's like, "Fucking for *real* this is happening? Vampire high school ROCKS!" *Run away, Arlene thinks, As fast as your legs can take you. I guess...* The other voices return: *This is wrong. It's wrong. I shouldn't be feeling like this. I just want to watch them do it. Damn... He hypnotized her. I heard they can do that just by looking at you. Somebody... She's gonna let him feed... I'm telling Reverend...*

Sam grabs her, and pulls her into the back, away from all the words. "Sookie, You're being a very stupid girl." She tells him off and says she can take care of herself. "I don't think so. Mack could have cut you up last night. How do you know what he'd have done? You settin' up a date with a vampire? What do you have, a death wish?" She says not a death wish, just a belief that judging an entire group of people based on the actions of a few individuals is morally wrong. Without strong morals, she would have drowned long ago. He tells her he won't let her put herself, or the bar, in danger. She asks if she's fired, and he puts his hand to his forehead in frustration: "No! But next time you think somebody's being harmed in the parking lot, pick up the phone and call the police. Do not go out there alone like a *goddamn vigilante!*" His voice is so loud at the end there that it scares him; it scares her more,

shocking out some tears. All the tension and the weirdness and the fear and the sex well up, and she weeps, falling into his comforting embrace. "Oh, chère. Don't you know I couldn't stand to lose you?" That's what he says, but what he's thinking is the truth too. *Feels so warm... I can't help it. I want you. Damn, you smell so good... I love the way you smell. I love you, and I always have. I want to tell you the truth...* How often does he lose control? Has this happened before?

-- Page 23 --

Sookie backs up, more upset than ever, but Tara runs in to scream at her too. "Are you out of your ever-loving mind? That vampire wants you for dinner. I won't let you just walk into his trap. Ma'am, over my dead body. You mean too much to me." (*Don't you look at me like that when I'm looking out for you. I never noticed how much you and Jason have the same eyes. Such sweet eyes. He could never kill anybody...*) Sookie nearly screams with frustration, with embarrassment and confusion and desire to hurt: "Oh for heaven's sakes, Tara, Jason is never going to care about you the way you care about him." Tara's reaction is beautifully acted, eloquently ineloquent: "What the fuck? Y...? You made a prom... You stay out of my head!" (*Sookie... I know how hard for her it's got to be... your burden... I understand, Sam thinks. Maybe he does. Promised you would never do that again... Maybe Jason will get shook up by this whole Maudette...*) Sookie shivers and shouts. "Shut up, the both of you! And stop bossing me around! I am a grown woman, and I am the one who decides what I do, not one of you." She storms out, and Sam holds Tara back.

The Merlotte's sign turns off, leaving the parking lot darker. Sookie steps out tentatively, looking for Bill. Sam comes out and smiles at her, tender and quiet and unsure. She smiles and tells him she doesn't need anybody to wait with her. "Go home, Sam. Night." He smiles, gentled, and lets himself into another part of the building to sleep. She heads out to her car, as his house lights go down. There's an old car in the distance; a fluttering outside the light. Of course, she investigates; strange hands take hold of her and throw her to the ground, kicking her again and again until the blood pours from her mouth. It's Denise and Mack. She chokes on it.

## WHAT DISTANT DEEPS OR SKIES

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 2 | Aired on 09.14.2008

*The First Taste* - Sookie tries to get her head around what happens when your boyfriend's buddies are undead jerks, some other jerks we hate get themselves permanently dead, Jason employs a unique and very naked strategy to get himself under control, and Tara rules the world.

Luckily, Sookie's telepathic powers now seem to include being the [Smoke Monster](#), so she handily beats up the Rattrays again, but not before they injure her substantially enough that she's required to slurp a whole big mess of Bill's blood, turning her into yet another kind of giant superhero -- though not a vampire -- for the remainder of the day. Not bad for a first date, even one that includes your date licking blood out of your head wound. She tells him, in a funny memory montage, about how she could never date because all men are gross inside their hearts while Bill is gross right in front of you, and remembers how traumatic her gifts were for her parents. (Before they died, which was probably slightly more traumatic for them.)

Jason sits in the police station for twelve hours before they finally show him video that seems to exonerate him -- turns out he really did think he'd murdered Maudette after all. The video of their creepy sex involves him choking her to fake-death and leaving in a panic, and then her laughing her butt off at his dumbness. However, since the apartment was scrubbed of all other dirty videos means he's still under suspicion, and he has more ridiculously hot sex with Dawn in order to take the edge off. She leaves him the next morning tied to her bed, as a little joke. I hope that doesn't have dire consequences!

Lafayette takes (his cousin!) Tara to a party, where she makes it clear she's an equal-opportunity asshole by scaring off a would-be suitor in a hilarious -- and mindblowingly Tara -- manner. Sookie learns more about the plight of Undead Americans from her TV, and the hateful Reverend who leads the anti-vampire coalition of religious nuts is found murdered by, presumably, a secret vampire cabal. Also murdered? The Rattrays, apparently by a tornado which Sookie knows is secretly named Bill. After smarting off at the local cops on the scene, she politely asks Bill not to kill anybody else.

Sam dares Sookie to look inside his brains at all his love thoughts, naively assuming she hasn't been aware of it the whole time, but there's a pretty much giant neon clue pointing to his true nature that you'd have to be blind -- or Sookie -- to ignore. In other romantic news not involving Bill, Tara gets this close to nailing Jason, doesn't quite seal the deal, and then laughs at herself in a charming and disarming fashion. Sexy Rene beats crap out of some jerks at the bar to defend her honor, but an overheard thought -- Arlene has gotten knocked up by him -- causes her to embrace Arlene and be brutally rebuffed. Lafayette continues to rule the entire world simply by standing there and saying normal things in a fabulous way.

Adele spends the whole day cleaning the house for Bill's first home visit, which goes weirdly thanks to Tara and Jason treating him like shit. Sookie apologizes by acting as a go-between for his home renovation needs, since most carpenters, electricians and the like don't work on the vampire schedule. She shows up at his house the next night with contact info, sweetly enough, and is surprised by two visiting vamps: one very hot and scary, the other ridiculous and goateed.

Final score: I love Sam and Jason unreservedly, and Tara is Citizen of the Week. Hooray for no more Tara hate! You may just be the [Brenda Chenowith](#) after all. Now, if we could just work on those constant *Six Feet Under* comparisons...

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Mack Rattray swings an imaginary chain in a circle over his head like a lasso, while his wife kicks the waitress in the stomach again. "Where's your fuckin' chain now?" He aims and kicks again, and Sookie screams aloud, calling out for God. They kick her together; Denise shakes her head by her ponytail, pushing it into the earth. "Here we go!" calls Mack, kicking her and howling at the moon. Denise laughs, and they kiss like Mickey and Mallory, the original trailer trash meth freaks, addicts indulging violence and sex and nature without rationality or mind, rebels without cause or effect, driven by need. Human.

A familiar dog appears, barking at them in fear and anger, and Mack smiles: "Well. Fuuuuuck you, Fido!" He pulls out a gun, and from somewhere inside Sookie pulls it together. She grasps him by one shin and throws him twenty yards or more, across the clearing. He slides down a tree, weakened but not out. "What the fuck...?" A tornado named Bill comes zooming in from the other side, and stabs him through the gut; Denise calls out to the tornado to show his face, and soon enough Bill's smashing her against trunks and roots and dirt, up and down again and to the side, until she stops fighting. The dog whines, and watches; its hackles raise, its skin goes cold. Sookie lies on the ground broken, blinking in and out, bleeding out, as the tornado's feet come to rest in her line of sight, and hands reach down.

Jason fucks Maudette Pickens on the video he should have known was there; Jason sits in the police station with Bud and Andy, watching Jason fuck Maudette Pickens. Watching Jason and Andy and Bud watch Jason fuck Maudette Pickens. "It's too bad I don't have fangs," he grunts. "Rip your fuckin' throat out. Fuck, yeah! Here it comes," he says, watching himself fuck Maudette Pickens, describing it as it's happening. Telling her what she already knows, as though she's a mirror. She's dirty, and Jason is clean; this is one way he stays clean, by conquering what's dirty. Everything is sex if you look at it right. Everybody knows he could do better than her; anyone could see his hands around her throat. She's a mirror; she's two bites on the thigh. "Are you ready?" He comes and comes and comes, squeezing her throat, hands moving of their own accord, left behind. Jason watches Jason's hands, left behind, like umbrellas in a taxi to the airport. Sometimes things just happen.

"That was intense, huh? Maudette..." Jason watches Jason shake her, hands tied to the ceiling, back arched, eyes open. "What happened?" If he had fangs he could have ripped her throat out. He shakes her, and starts to cry; he puts on his jeans and starts to run. Jason watches Jason run, and Bud and Andy watch Jason start to cry.

-- Page 2 --

Jason watches Maudette Pickens start to laugh. She walks toward the camera to turn it off, laughing to herself, calling him a moron. As though he doesn't have a lick of sense; like he's a kid, in the way, not getting the joke. There are things in the world that Jason doesn't understand yet, but he will. He'll conquer the unknown and become a man. Everything is sex if you look at it right. We're all just trying to be seen. To matter. Jason watches Maudette

laugh at Jason and starts to laugh himself. He pumps fists in the air: "I didn't kill her!" Andy points out that, well, somebody did. That's not what's important.

What's important is this: Bill, carrying a bloody waitress through an impossible forest. Her face is nearly unrecognizable, covered in blood; marked by death.

Well, it was a vampire, of course. Jason saw the fangs when he watched him on the video; Jason saw the fang marks on her inner thigh, back when sex was about pleasure. "We know, we examined the body." Sheriff Bud asks, as a point of interest, whether maybe this "vampire" is the same one Jason's sister is messing around with. "Okay. First, my sister ain't messin' around with nobody. My sister don't mess around. And second? ...I don't know. I never met the other vampire. I never met any vampire, and I hope to hell I never do." Jason describes the vampire from the video tape, remembering him and the ways he was inhuman: "Bald-headed. Weird skeleton tattoo. And he looked crazy. Crazy out of his motherfuckin' mind!" All true. Andy tells Jason this is the only tape they could find in Maudette's apartment; Jason says this is because it's a frame-up, and when Andy Bellefleur points out that Jason could be the one who hid them, so as to cover his tracks, it takes Jason a while to understand what he means. "Aww. Come on, Andy. I'm not that smart!"

Bill lays her down swampside, like the opposite of every fairytale; he says her name in a weird way, over and over. "Suckie. Suckie!" Her eyelids flutter; she suddenly realizes she can't feel her legs. (See, this is *exactly* why I don't get into gang wars with trailer trash crackheads. They have no sense of honor.) Bill props her up and bites into his wrist, ripping the flesh away. "Quick, drink before the wound closes!" Sookie's cognizant enough to ask if this will turn her into a vampire, and he says it won't. "Goddamn it, Suckie, do you want to live or not?" She resists for a moment, and then leans closer to the v-juice, getting its scent for the first time, taking her first taste. Then she ... gets real thirsty. Bill watches as she gets more and more into it, blood all over her face, drinking it down like a kiss. Like the hungriest kiss imaginable. (Wouldn't you feel like you were being possibly punk'd? I would not be able to film this scene without Alan Ball actually taking me into his lap and promising me that this is not a joke. "Okay Anna, so in this scene you're a paraplegic covered in your own blood in the middle of a swamp, and now you're fellating a dead man's arm. Take one.")

-- Page 3 --

Tara comes home after a night of terrorizing people in her own way; the TV's blaring so loud she can hear it before she reaches the door. On the coffee table there's more trash culture: *Angelina Adopts Vampire Baby*, which is funny five different ways, *Can True Love Survive Hollywood?*, an empty vodka bottle. She looks down at her mother, passed out on the couch, and sighs; on the TV a man is attempting to name states. Lafayette's driving when his phone rings ("Pick up the phone, biaaaatch, witcha sexy ass! Pick up the phone, biaaaatch, witcha sexy ass!") and he answers politely. "Hello, hooker. What's the T?" Tara pours great mounds of sugar onto her Lucky Charms and asks where he is. "I'm on my way to a party in Monroe. And hell no, I ain't swingin' by to pick your needy ass up." She begs. "My momma's passed out on the coach, and I can't face cleaning her up and putting her to bed. It's just too goddamn depressing." What's depressing, he explains, is how often Tara makes this call. "Why come you won't call Jason Stackhouse?"

Tara explains that Lafayette is a mean, nasty bitch, and he informs her right back that she needs to move her sorry ass out of her momma's house. He says he'll come to rescue her, but she'll need to find her own ride home, in case he gets lucky. "What do you mean, 'if you

get lucky'? Your standards are so low you always get lucky." He laughs and agrees with a holy hallelujah. It shouldn't be this fun to be Lafayette, and that's the secret of Lafayette.

Dawn comes to her door at three in the morning, to answer a panicked knocking; Dawn watches Jason through the peephole. He wanders in, dazed and uninvited; this is the prerogative of mortal men, that they don't have to be invited. He stumbles to her couch and stares at her, unseeing. "You have no idea what I've been through since last night. I spent the whole day thinkin' I'd really killed Maudette Pickens." Jason picks up a random beer from her coffee table, and sucks it down. Dawn sits beside him, stricken. "I thought I'd accidentally strangled her during sex," he says; Dawn's impressed. "And Bud and fucking Andy waited twelve! Whole! Hours! To show me a videotape that proved I didn't do it!" He starts to cry again, leaning into her arms. His body curls into hers. "I thought I'd ruined my whole life," he weeps, and puts his forehead on her chest. Everything is sex if you look at it right; Jason watches Jason make love to Dawn as though sex is still about pleasure, as though sex is only part of nature. Other people's bodies remind us that our own exist. Jason watches Jason do what Jason does best, as he kisses her breasts and focuses his body on hers. Dawn watches Jason make love to her, and laughs.

-- Page 4 --

Bill licks the blood from the waitress's forehead as she drowses, and she awakes with that curious focus she often has: "Do I taste different from other people?" He admits that she does, and asks what she is. "Well, apparently I'm not dead." She smiles weakly up at him, his confused and unbreakable gaze. "But what I am is telepathic. I can hear people's thoughts." Bill backs way up from her and this confession: "Even mine?" No. "That's why I like you so much. I can't hear you at all. You have no idea how peaceful it is after a lifetime of... blah blah blah..." Her eyes focus; her eyes focus on his, and she closes them again. Her head goes slack and he looks sweetly down at her. She opens her eyes again, feeling stronger, and laughs silently, trying to sit up of her own accord. There are slow violins, in the swampy night. It's the perfect place for a fairy tale about sex, and violence, and nature. He touches her cheek and helps her sit against a trunk: "May I ask you a personal question?" She goes into Alice mode: "Bill. You were just licking blood out of my head. I don't think it gets much more personal than that." Valid. "How do you manage a social life with men your own age? Their only thought must be..." Men are beasts. She explains she doesn't date, and remembers a few times she broke this rule.

One betrayal, as she poured mustard on her burger (*Man, I can't wait to see her naked. I wonder if she's a natural blond. Nothing worse than a blond with a big, black bush...*): that one got a squirt of mustard to the face, out of the blue, and was shocked, and pissed. Not every guy was a pig, though: (... *kind of girl I could marry and spend the rest of my life with. And never have those thoughts of Matt Damon... Jake Gyllenhaal in Jarhead, with that little Santa hat...*). That time, she got out of the car and never looked back.

Bill laughs with her. "...But it always ends up the same." Bill wonders aloud: there must be people in her life that know. "The people closest to me, but... We never talk about it. And I do my best to stay out of their heads. Over the years I've learned how. I figure it's kind of unethical to listen in on my family and my friends, my boss. But they know. Other people suspect or... they think I'm psychic. Most people just think I'm crazy." This is the prerogative of Sookie's kind: they don't have to be invited. Romance takes a lifetime, you learn the better parts before the worst; Sookie gets it all at once, like a poem, light and dark. "It's sort of like ... a stream of consciousness. Gets weirder when people are mad or... upset

and... sometimes... (A woman stares at her husband, across the table at Merlotte's, and faster than a blink she's shattered a bottle across his face; a woman watches her husband and does nothing) Sometimes it's just images."

-- Page 5 --

She shifts under his gaze; he wants her. "...I should be gettin' home." He doesn't move. She tries to stand, and is shocked into a smile. "Wow. I feel completely healed." She is. This is life we're talking about: *Full is not heavy as empty, not nearly my love, not nearly my love, not nearly*. He cocks his head at her. "Do doctors know that v-juice can do this?" No way. "And we wanna keep it that way. I should show you to your car." He looks at her a bit longer and stands, holding out a hand.

At the party in Monroe, Lafayette knows everybody. He's like Puck, Mercutio, a mascot, everywhere at once. Tara watches him from afar, balanced against Sookie and against Lafayette too: she holds people at a distance because she must, and because she enjoys it. Most people just think she's crazy; everybody knows she's a bitch. There's nothing worse than a beautiful girl that doesn't want anything from you. A ridiculous man with a pick in his hair swaggers over, humming his approval. She grins, because he's a tool, and they introduce themselves. Terrell says "alright" before and after every clause in every sentence. "So what's a fine girl like you doing sitting here all by herself?" She answers honestly: "I'm watching my fool cousin trying to hit on the straightest man here." Lafayette backs it up, booty-dancing on the crotch of a man caught between affection and hilarity and stark raving fear. Terrell advances the theory that he's actually the straightest man at the party -- she can ask any of the "honeys" at the party to confirm. He's got that whole vulpine metro lady's-man thing happening, like TC Carson on *Living Single*: almost unbelievable, but very sure about itself. Terrell watches Tara watch Terrell.

Tara informs her suitor that she's married, which he assures her is not a problem. She swallows fearfully. "Well, my husband is a mercenary. Yeah, Black oil. He just got back from assassinating some guys in Iraq." He's not buying, but she insists it's true: "He ain't worth me, I can tell you that. But if he ever caught me with another man, he'd kill us both. I'm not sure who he'd kill first. Probably me." Her voice cracks, hilariously, and her eyes go wild: "I hope so..." Terrell offers the opinion that she is a crazy bitch, which she's heard before. "He already shot one guy in the nuts, just for buying me a CD..." He's standing before she hits the punchline, and flees. Tara watches the party, going on all around her; she's not a part of it. It's her prerogative to uninvite herself from everything; Tara watches Tara at the party, going on all around her, having chased off another beast. She looks around for Lafayette, but he's gone; she sits back again. This is how she's most comfortable, because she's never comfortable.

-- Page 6 --

Jason watches Jason fuck Dawn hardcore on the dresser; Jason screams and they fall back on the bed. Their sex is bed-breaking wild and brainlessly intense; Jason flips her over and watches Jason in the mirror. He's just a boy with a girl in bed, like he's always been. And she is human and he is human and this is the way we've always done things. This is what Jason's good at, in life; this is the protective posture he goes into. Every move he makes is closer to clean; sex is about everything else, if you look at it right. Jason points at Jason, congratulates him silently; Jason watches Jason fuck doggy style, and subdue the enemy again. Dawn is clean.

"How old are you? Am I allowed to ask that?" Bill was turned in 1865, when he was thirty "human years" old. (Weird term, but immortality must make those numbers so petty, counting out like the minutes of a dog's life.) Only thirty? He looks older. He's not offended: "Life was harder then." Sookie's excited to remember Gran's request, and asks if he was in the Civil War. Of course he was. "Would you be willing to come talk to my grandmother's club? It's... mostly a bunch of old people who had family in the war. They call themselves the Descendants Of The Glorious Dead." The music goes sort of ridiculously dramatic as Bill offers a short speech about the Glorious Dead, and war: "Bunch of starvin', freezin' boys, killin' each other so the rich people can stay rich. Madness." Sookie acknowledges that this is horrible, and that maybe reminiscing about the glory of war is different for the Descendents than it is for the Glorious Dead themselves; Bill just wants to know if it will make her happy. "Oh, It would make my grandmother ecstatic." Not the point. He asks again, and she nods: what he's handing her is an invitation, to call on him for a favor. To be a woman for a man. "Well... Yes." She stands at her car with a giant smile, and he says he'll do it, and looks forward to meeting Gran. "When may I call on you?" She's flirty, crushing, and says she's off tomorrow. "Just after dark, then," he says, and gives her some kind of vampy weird look that makes her feel shy. "Huh," she says, pointing at Sam Merlotte's trailer: "Sam's still up." But Bill is gone, vanished without a sound. "...That's creepy," Sookie muses to herself, and gets in the car.

Morning. Dawn. Jason wakes up and stares at the ceiling, gauges himself for the new day. Is he clean? Did he fuck it away? Did he find a clean woman and clean himself off? All that death, the curious betrayals of his body. How did he lose control like that? Not the choking, but the way the vampire was a mirror. Where did that come from? Is that normal? Would we all like to occasionally rip somebody's throat out, choke them while we come? Is that just nature? Gross me out. Better to rest your head on a clean woman's breast, to kiss her mouth, go back to the beginning, to be reborn, mouth and hand and cock; to watch Jason watching Jason fuck her. That answers the questions better than anything else; he could stay with her forever, now that he's seen the other side. Now that he's walked it, and been burned for it, twelve hours of torture and twenty-four of fear. Dawn's a nice girl, a beautiful girl. A normal, clean woman for a normal, clean man. He looks over at her, a new man: there are two marks on her collarbone.

-- Page 7 --

Just like that, it's all taken away again. He's dirtier than ever, standing in the place where vampires have stood, doing the things that vampires have done. Making love to dirty women. Like he hasn't got a lick of sense; in this new world, v-juice and violence, where sex is no longer about pleasure, he's just a child. He's in the way. Alone in the world with what he thought was sex, his idea of sex -- like any other kind of addict -- as the answer to every question. Like nobody understands you, or even sees you. It sucks, that's what it's like. We're all just trying to be seen. To matter. And these women, the ones you want to be clean, normal, the ones that can give you the peace you seek, they all hold these secrets. This dirtiness, same as him. Laughing behind his back, getting it better than even Jason Stackhouse could ever give it to them. The only thing he's good at, and they're pretending it's the best they've ever had, and laughing behind their eyes. Tears spring to his eyes, for the unknown, inside and out. They just keep taking it away.

Reverend Theodore Newlin, of the church of the Fellowship of the Sun, on Sookie's morning television: "We never should have given them the vote and legitimized their unholy existence." Nan Flanagan, of the American Vampire League, shrugs with her eyes. "The

American people need to know these are creatures of Satan! Demons, literally! They have no soul." Sharon, the host, reminds him of the consistently growing support for vampire rights, and he refuses to acknowledge that: "Those polls are fixed. Do you know how much money these monsters have given to politicians of both parties? As well as the corporate media?" It's the things we don't acknowledge that come up behind us, every time. Every thing we can't look at is a vampire; every time we choose blindness it's the dark that chooses us back. Nan calls this concept nonsense, and I'm guessing lies her ass off. "Vampires don't seek to control human policy, it's of very little interest to us." There's a coldness, an intensity and a brittleness behind her eyes, that no coaching, no amount spent on PR, can warm. This man is an insect.

"You can't trace any of it! It's all been laundered..." Newlin's going to die; this is the moment it happens. Nan goes twice as cold as dead: "Are you accusing my organization of criminal activity, sir?" Suddenly he's calling for mommy: "I will not speak to her directly, Sharon." Sharon asks why that is, and the answer is the usual. "My commitment to Christ Jesus, praise His name, compels me not to recognize her kind." The things we don't acknowledge. "Well, that's gonna make it difficult to have a dialogue." He begins to repeat himself, again, from the beginning, and even Sharon has to roll her eyes.

-- Page 8 --

Gran and Sookie agree that Jesus wouldn't mind vampires; wouldn't judge a person based on this particular issue. Sookie asks if the sausage is different today, v-juice coursing through her still: "It tastes so much more complex than it usually does," she says, and Adele frets that it's gone bad. "No, it's delicious. It's like I can close my eyes and I can see the farm the pig lived on, and feel the sun and the rain on my face, and even taste the earth that the herbs grew out of." Gran stares at her, because that was a mouthful. Especially for a werewolfish cliché like this, so hoary and old that you don't need to really explain it. But this is about connecting nature, and violence, and sex: Sookie can't go after the sex part yet, because of her particular qualities and burdens, but she can get there through the food, through the violence and the death inherent in the food; through the pleasure and sustenance and sensuality of food. Tara enters, heading for the coffee, and Adele welcomes her, ordering her to sit and offering to make a new pot.

(Of all the kinds of intimacy this show and this episode is about, the whole invitation thing -- the places where we overlap with other people's living spaces, and how this itself overlaps with the ways our lives overlap -- made the biggest impression on me. I've always been fascinated and kind of insanely governed by the rules governing the host and hostess, the way we treat guests, the complicated choreography of invitation and welcome, of service to others, of pride in the home. Sodom was destroyed, for these: not the weird sex shit -- which the "hero" of the tale took to an even weirder place than the Sodomites, frankly -- but the other part: the part where socially, in the Middle East, to treat a guest with anything other than perfect respect meant death for them, in the desert. When all you've got are small houses and oases, with miles and miles of death between them, the art of the hostess is a matter of life or death. And, like anything unnatural -- i.e., that which *resists nature*, that which is Apollonian and not Dionysian blah blah blah -- that's necessary for society to exist, it becomes part of God's law. Even vampires must abide by it. Vampires don't have choices, they have hungers; humans don't have unbreakable rules, they have prerogatives. Which is scarier? Drink of one and you lose the knowledge of good and evil; drink of the other and you have eternal life. And thousands of years later Martha Stewart's on the Internet or channel 586 telling you five great ways to spruce up a front

room using common household items... But we're still leaving the door wide open for Elijah. I like that.)

-- Page 9 --

And so the first thing Sookie does is tell Tara she looks awful (which is technically impossible, and invite her -- without being asked, which is her prerogative as a friend and a host, as family -- to take a shower and borrow some clothes. Tara's first question is about Jason, who has been released; she claims she knew he'd go free, but Sookie wasn't so sure. Tara's first question is about Sookie, who wasn't murdered by a vampire in the night like Tara assumed she would be. Tara has no idea how close she came to being half-right, or how completely wrong she is, about who kills who. Sookie looks down, caught, and Tara sighs loudly. "Oh, Sookie! Sometimes you are just plain dumb." Sookie tells her to shut up, because Gran is tolerant and kind, but still a grandmother. "Lucky Gran was already in bed when I got in last night." Tara asks if he bit her, and on her insistence that he didn't -- and again, the opposite is true -- reminds her of the rumor that vampires can hypnotize you, and feed without your knowing. I wish Jason were here for that part, because that part is true.

"Yeah, and black people are lazy, and Jews have horns," Sookie shrugs at her friend, but Adele returns before Tara can do much beyond grunting: this is different! Jews and black people are human, as discovered by the white man and that WAS relatively recently! Tara brings up Jason and Adele fusses over the coffee: "I can't even believe that they arrested him to begin with. I have a good mind to call Bud Dearborne and chew him out. Jason's a good boy, everybody knows that." Tara and Sookie grin about that, over the table, over a grandmother's selective blindness. The phone rings, the gossip grapevine, and Adele takes it into the parlor, exclaiming excitedly.

Sookie apologizes for being a bitch to Tara last night (specifically, telling her that Jason will never love her, which is pretty bitchy in all honesty) and Tara apologizes for mother-henning Sookie about the bloodsucking fiend she seems intent on dating. "I just worry about you, Sookie. You're basically my only friend..." These two girls, who have more in common than anyone else on earth: both unnatural, both slightly freaky, both terrified of seeing or showing too much. Jason enters, looking for breakfast, and Tara basically does a flip in the air trying to get his attention. "Hey, hey Jason. I'm so glad they didn't lock you up." He nearly makes a sour face, for being reminded, and whines that "somebody heard [he]d been with Maudette." The girls ask if he was; Sookie's all, "Are you sure? She was a woman." Which is only so-so funny, but exists on the page only to set up his retort: "That's funny. At least she was human." So I guess it goes: Men, then women without sex lives, then everybody else on earth, then total whores (aka women with sex lives), and finally vampires. That's the official rubric. Good to have that out of the way, because I had been wondering, but I can't be entirely fussy about it, because of all the things that Jason Stackhouse is allowed to do to you -- which is of course a very long list if you have any taste at all -- choking you while he comes should never be on it, which is just like common sense, so Maudette Pickens actually kind of was a gross whore, self-esteemwise. Bless her heart.

-- Page 10 --

Gran enters, ordering Jason to sit down so she can fix him breakfast, and all on fire about how a tornado named Bill touched down over at Four Tracks Corners, turning over the trailer in the clearing and killing the couple that lived there. Whom Jason knows, because all those

boys bought drugs from the Rattrays. Sookie stares and stares; apparently they were trapped under it, and crushed to a pulp. I'm guessing there wasn't a shitload of blood at the scene, and I'm guessing they were already dead when the thing fell on them. Sookie, too: she drives her little yellow car to the scene, which is pretty much a disaster like you see on TV whenever a tornado trashes a trailer home, and what Sookie is wearing is, as usual, on that funny line between inviolate innocence and totally sexy lush wildness -- that green polka-dot bikini, under a barely-there sun shift that, as usual, serves as a foyer to her buttocks more than anything -- and it occurs to me that, in 2008, Sookie has to be both because there aren't any stock female characters that could possibly do the acrobatic character yoga that Sookie has to do, and who better to play this character than somebody who's still and probably always going to be a little bit hard to deal with, because we got to know her when she was a tiny little child and she's not exactly visually all that different from when she was a tiny little child.

Which is brilliant. Five years ago it would have been Ricci, but Ricci has gone all the way to sexy, plus she's weirdly skinny now, but once upon a time she had that whole *Is It Okay To Fuck Wednesday Addams yet*" thing happening, and it never occurred to me to wonder what would happen when Anna Paquin grew up, or how Alan Ball named his movie after the rose petals he threw at Mena Suvari's tits until it got uncomfortable, or how his new movie is about Aaron Eckhart fucking another child. And I guess if you line those things up that way, it might start to look creepy, but I don't know. Pedophilia is gross because there's no choice, just power and experience making decisions for somebody who's not old enough to even be in the room, but isn't it just as abusive or objectifying to only see it from that adult perspective? To assume that because a person *looks* young that they're incapable of making choices? It's provocative, not descriptive, to look at Sookie Stackhouse and say, "The only person with a problem resolving these two very different signals is you." Sookie's still a grown-ass woman making choices; it's just the wardrobe that's reminding you she's 5'5" and a self-proclaimed prude.

-- Page 11 --

Anyway, the trailer is so fucked there's a chair in a tree, but so specifically targeted that everything else is calm and peaceful. Sookie stares and stares and a big black van drives up just then. There's a funny man in a boat, fishing, in an airbrushed painting on the side of the van. A [guy](#) named Mike Spencer gets out of the van in a coroner's vest and says hello; he was her parents' undertaker, which means she's known him I guess for most of her life. Now he's also the Parish Coroner, which Sookie notes is convenient for him, in terms of generating multiple streams of revenue. He laughs shyly. Sheriff Bud gets out of the van and tells Sookie it's a restricted crime scene and asks why she's there. She goes into Lolita mode automatically, perfectly innocent and perfectly intimate: "Oh, well when I heard what happened, I just had to come look. What an awful thing!" Bud allows as how Sookie wasn't fond of the Rattrays, and in fact heard from his niece, an ER nurse in Monroe, that "somebody" fucked up Mack real bad last night. (Which I can't figure out, because he's talking about the chain thing, but that was two nights ago at least, because Sookie wore this bikini the morning after that, and then went to work.) Mike says the rumor is that Sookie was the one that did it, and Sookie doesn't even give a slight fuck: "Well? They were hurting a friend of mine." I love that everybody, including Sookie and most viewers, just assumes she fights like a motherfucker and none of them even question how she could take down a couple of crackheads by throwing a chain underhand approximately one yard and then sitting back and watching quietly like she'd rather be knitting.

"This be that vampire I been hearing about? The one who was living at the old Compton house?" Sookie is enchanted! "The old Compton house? Just across the field from my house?" Mike Spencer asks Sookie if Adele's just letting her hang out with fangs now, and she turns a wild look on him: "You can take that up with her. I'm sure she'd just love to know that somebody thinks she's not taking proper care of me." She explains to Bud how they were draining Bill, which is against the law after all, so she was just doing her civic duty when she beat the shit out of them. "...And now they're dead," the Sheriff says, acting just like he does in every scene that every word out of his mouth is this Hercule Poirot like moment of glory where he's finally got you. "Um, *tornado?*" Bud levels yet another astounding feat of logic at her: "Tornados hop." Also, nobody noticed a tornado last night. Besides the Rattrays, of course, who noticed it like whoa. Sookie asks them if they're honestly suggesting that one man could do this, and Mike coughs: "He's not a man." Sookie thinks about that, standing in the wreckage that seems to suggest Mike's not entirely off-base, but quickly enough returns to her liberal whitewash rhetoric, masking a return volley as redneck education: "They're really not that different from you and me. If you bothered to try to get to know one..."

-- Page 12 --

Bud's honestly concerned and barely judgmental: "-- Sookie. You're a good girl. I hate to see you go down this path." Well, it's frustrating, isn't it? All the good intentions in the world don't amount to much when what they're taking away is your choice, your right to make choices. Sookie has been treated like a child or a Carson McCullers character most of her life, rolls her eyes. She hates it when people treat her like she hasn't got a lick of sense; like she's still just a kid, without choices, or a burden, in their way. Or a trespasser. It sucks; she feels alone in the world, like nobody understands her. They barely see her. She's just trying to be seen. To matter. These are the parts of her life she's claimed as her own, and she won't have anybody talking to her like anything less than the lady she's chosen to be. "Well lucky for you, Sheriff Dearborne, nobody's forcing you to watch. Now, if y'all two rednecks will excuse me, I gotta go." Bud watches her leave.

Adele's vacuuming the parlor when Sookie enters; she looks at her Gran bemusedly, hands on hips. "You know, he sleeps in the ground all day, I don't think he's gonna even look at the rug." Gran explains that we don't do this for them, we do it for ourselves: "So I can be proud of my home... And how do you know where he sleeps?" Sookie giggles and admits that she doesn't, and Gran starts vacuuming again. Sookie notices a smell, a rotten smell or something, which Adele can't smell, and gets a funny, low-key response: Gran sort of shivers all over, and goes, "Well find it!" Sookie moves the piano bench, and finds something small, like a bit of cheese or something, and takes it toward the garbage, confusing Gran.

"Oh. Sookie." Sookie turns. "Jason and Tara are coming over this evening as well." Sookie's horrified, but Adele says it's their prerogative: "Well, they invited themselves! Jason said that he wants to meet the vampire for himself, and Tara said she thought she ought to be here as well." Sookie's frustrated, pretending to be just bewildered by everybody "getting their panties in a wad about some stupid vampire," and Gran asks if she'd prefer to be alone with him. Sookie falls into a goofy grin and says she doesn't know. "Maybe." Gran smiles to herself, and Sookie asks if she's not going to tell her -- the one person one earth who's allowed -- to be careful, and Gran applies some majorly masterful grandmotherly mojo to the situation: "You're always careful, Sookie. About what counts. And I can depend on that.

Isn't that right?" Sookie nods, Adele having put the kind of whammy on her you have to be in your sixties to play, and leaves. Gran worries a little bit, but she keeps vacuuming.

-- Page 13 --

Dusk. Jason's truck arrives. A bit later, Tara watches Jason open a beer for himself. "Look, I'm just saying. Do you want a vampire sucking blood out of you?" Sookie complains she's just trying to get to know him, but Jason's not done: "That's where it's gonna end up. Always does." Sookie asks WTF he even knows about vampires, and he says portentously that he knows a lot more than he cares to, causing Sookie to flounce exasperatedly for the parlor, dropping silly folksy weirdo colloquialisms in her wake. Tara watches Jason bring the beer to his mouth, and finally speaks up. "Uh uh, that's my beer. You asked if I wanted anything to drink, and I said I'd have a beer. And that's when you went to the fridge." His hands were like umbrellas, forgotten in his thirst; he exercised his prerogative and forgot what he had offered her. He apologizes vociferously; she drinks deep and watches his ass as he gets another.

Sookie's sweeping the front porch when he arrives, again, without a sound or warning. She gasps, and realizes it's boundary time: Bill, I... I don't like it when you do that." He worries that he's upset her, and she assures him it's fine, putting the broom aside. She makes way for him to enter the house, and he doesn't move. She giggles, but he explains that she has to invite him in; he can't even try, though she dares him to like always. She loves this part. "That is so weird!" She calms herself down and grins. "Oh, Bill, won't you please come in?" He thanks her, but she steps in front of him, asking about the other half: "So. If I were to withdraw my invitation, would you have to leave?" He nods as though the thought is mortally wounding to him; maybe it is. Maybe he's in love. "Well, I'll have to remember that," she says, once again reminding him of all the ways she retains the power here, and steps aside.

There's nowhere to cut because all the main characters are in the same room, so it's just later. Adele offers little sandwiches to the suspiciously staring Tara and very angry fangophobic Jason -- who takes too many and must arrange them on the tail of his Alabama Thunderpussy t-shirt as though it's a plate -- before turning to their guest. Bill shakes his head, a little awkwardly, and Adele gasps, remembering immediately that he doesn't eat and horrified that she's caught him off-guard. Across from him, Jason takes a big lovely bite.

"Your people, Mr. Compton. They were from this area, I believe?" Yes. His father was a Compton and his mother was a Loudermilk. "Oh, there are a lot of Loudermilks left! But I'm afraid old Mr. Jesse Compton died last year..." Bill nods. That's why he's back in Bon Temps, there aren't any living Comptons, so he's taken over the old Compton place. "And as I expect the VRA to pass, I..." Jason interrupts immediately, ignoring Sookie's stare. "I wouldn't be too sure about that if I were you. A lot of Americans don't think you people deserve special rights." Bill points out that they're not special, just equal, and as usual in this conversation Jason ignores him altogether: "No, I'm just saying there's a reason things are the way they are." Bill agrees, and calls it out as injustice, which infuriates Jason even more: "Listen! It's called This Is How We Do It!" He points at the floor with every word. "This is my house," Adele says quietly. "I will not tolerate rudeness." Jason grumbles. Where logic fails or contradicts, we will always have the status quo; wherever a man benefits from his circumstance, he will always name it tradition; whatever a man recognizes in himself, and fails to acknowledge, must be regulated in all others.

Gran puts a new smile on a new conversation. "Did you know the Stackhouses, Mr. Compton?" He did; she squeals with joy. "I remember Jonas Stackhouse. He and his wife moved here when Bon Temps was just a hole in the road. I was a young man of sixteen..." Jason rolls his eyes. "Isn't this the house he built? I mean, at least in part?" It was. Adele squeals again, basking in the light of the Glorious Dead. Tara speaks up suddenly, intruding: "Did you own slaves?" Bill didn't, but just in case Tara decides for the first time in her life to calm down, he admits his father did: "A house slave, a middle-aged woman whose name I cannot recall, and... A yard slave. A young, strong man named Minus." Adele bounces up and down: "Oh, this is just the sort of thing my club will be so interested in hearing about!" Tara doesn't back down: "About *slaves*?" Sookie's like, "Dude?" But she has a point, I mean, she's sitting right there. I'm as uncomfortable with Southern nostalgia as I would be if you opened up a door in your house that led to the Nazi memorabilia. There are infinite better things to do with our shame than simply deciding that it's to be celebrated -- and then expecting everyone to agree with that, lest *they* be accused of intolerance. Give me a fucking break. There's historical interest, and then there's pride in legacy, and what's really hard to explain to a racist is how they're two different things. Gran's great, but nobody is one hundred percent great. You can love her without indulging her inherent racism, which is all Tara's doing, and Gran knows that: "Well, about ... Anything having to do with that time."

Awkward stares abound, and Bill decides to try his hand at being charming. As usual, it comes off stilted and creepy. "I look forward to speaking to your club, Mrs. Stackhouse." She giggles; he stands. "Now. If it's all right with you, I thought that Sookie and I might take a walk. It's such a lovely night." Adele, who couldn't be more into Bill Compton if he were a living human being, says it's fine with her if it's okay with Sookie, and Jason puts down both his beer and his foot. "I don't think that's a good idea," he says officially, and Sookie tells him it's none of his business; Adele backs her up. He throws a hissy fit about how he's "the man in this family," and it's only out of affection that everybody in the room doesn't pat his ignorant ass on the head and laugh in his face. In a shirt that says Alabama Thunderpussy on it, which still has crumbs from the sandwiches he just ate in a manner not unlike that of a five-year-old child, he says this. I mean, it's adorable. "You are a man in this family, but I am the oldest person here, and this is my house. You better respect me, boy."

In the awkward quiet, you can really hear the eponymous Fiona Apple song for the first time, speaking the words that Sookie can't say; the words not even Tara can say for her: *I do not struggle in your web/ Because it was my aim to get caught/...I'm finally growing weary/ Of waiting to be consumed by you...* The last words Jason would ever say, now, a clean boy in a dirty world, watching the fangs take over his house like they've taken over his body and all his women and his thoughts and his dreams and his blood: *Give me the first taste/ Let it begin, heaven cannot wait forever/ Darling, just start the chase/ I'll let you win/ But you must make the endeavor...*

To break the tension and continue his flirtation with Gran, Bill points out that he's the oldest person there, by like 75 years, and everybody laughs except Jason, who makes a hilariously ugly fake-laugh face. Because he's so grown up, you see. Bill escorts Sookie out of the house, and Jason whines that Adele made him look like a fool in front of Bill Compton. "You don't need any help looking like a fool," she says kindly, patting his cheek. There's no way for him to explain that it's just survival. This is the area of his life he's trying to claim as

his, his body and his home and his family, and here they are invading on every level. He's just trying to stay clean and afloat, and they keep taking away his options.

Walking through the yard, toward the field, Sookie puts it on the table immediately: "I went to the Rattrays' trailer," she says matter-of-factly. She doesn't have much to say about that, other than knowing they need to talk about it. It's a nice note on her character, that the Rattrays have offended enough of her rules -- e.g., No Killing Sookie -- that she doesn't really seem to care that they died. If Bill hadn't shown up, I wonder how far she would have gone. He follows her lead, deadpanning that she knew he was strong, and she's hilarious as usual: "I don't believe I fully gauged the extent of your strength." He says they get stronger as they get older, and better at hiding their tracks. She points out that in this case, a highly implausible tornado that acts like no other tornado ever was not the best option. Their laughter is whistles past the graveyard of their differences and the realities -- blood, sex, death -- of his existence. And hers. And ours.

"So. I guess you've killed a lot of people?" My God, this is like every date I've ever been on. Bill admits that he killed a few at first, when he was new, just by accident: "I was never sure when I was gonna get my next feed... But it's all different now! There's Tru Blood, I can get donor blood from a clinic in Monroe, or I can glamour someone into letting me feed on them for love, and then they'll forget all about it..." Sookie stops and asks if he ate the Rattrays. He did, while she was out of it and healing: "You drank a *lot* of my blood," he says, like that's his excuse. Maybe it is, I lost my moral compass about a mile back. "Yes, I drank the blood of those crackheads we magically beat up, and then stashed the bodies under their home, which I destroyed. As is my prerogative. But to be fair, you had sucked a lot of blood out of my body at the time, and I was fairly hungry." Sookie summons her courage and asks the question she's got to ask: "What will that do to me?" Keener senses, hyperactive libido, they both blush and she asks if that's it. She doesn't look up; she knows there's more. What's the most romantic thing you can think of? If you shared bodily fluids with somebody, out in the night air, what would you want to be true? "I'll always be able to feel you. I'll be able to find you fast. If you're ever in trouble, that could come in quite handy." She looks him in the eye, conflicted: "You're gonna have to give me a minute here, Bill. I'm feeling a little overwhelmed." She walks on and he follows behind; she looks at him over her shoulder.

-- Page 16 --

It's high school fantasy zipless-fuck talk, but there's something else there. Something about territory, about having a mark on you. The marks of death, calling you out in the night, an arrow pointing to you, leading something that kills to your door. She gave up her prerogative here, to invite, when she drank. You can't undrink v-juice any more than they can undrink us. She can't hear him, but he will always hear her, now. When you're Sookie, you have to keep reminding people, men, that you have control, because men are beasts. But on the occasions you're not in control, or the circumstances in which you're not the one in power... It's a good thing he's courtly.

Men and women are consistently fascinated and kind of insanely governed by the rules governing them: the way men treat women, gallantry and chivalry, the complicated choreography of invitation and welcome, of service to others, of pride in ourselves. Men have the advantage, physically and socially, over women. Their right to choose whether or not to have sex, is naturally -- in terms of nature -- simply greater. So the art of the gentleman is a matter of life or death. And, like anything unnatural that's necessary for

society to exist, it becomes part of God's law. Marriage, chastity, rape taboos; the way men keep trying to sneak rape in under other names and with other cover stories: Men don't have choices, they have hungers; women don't have unbreakable rules, they have prerogatives.

Think about the choreography of dating and marriage -- and I mean, like, the corsage kind from the Olden Days -- and how much (all) of it is about protecting women from the physical intimidation of men. Giving women all the power and permissions for intimacy, while depriving them of any power or individuality separate from their sexuality; making God's law out of common sense and then regulating women's sexuality on their behalf. Let gays get married, or women have sex before marriage, and maybe the whole thing falls apart, but I don't know. Nonconsensual sex is evil because there's no choice, just power and experience making decisions for somebody else. But isn't it just as abusive or objectifying to only see it from that paternalistic perspective? To assume that because a person *looks* weaker or smaller than they're incapable of making choices? It's provocative, not descriptive, to look at Sookie Stackhouse and say, "The only person with a problem resolving these two very different signals is you." Sookie's still a grown-ass woman making choices; it's just the wardrobe that's reminding you she's 5'5" and a self-proclaimed prude. She needs her body to be a sovereign nation in two ways -- as something safe and protected unto itself, and something empowered to make its own choices -- both of which men have been engaged in undermining as long as there have been men and women. Which is half the charm, I think, with Bill: he's courtly, he'll play the game, but all the same he's unafraid of her body. Between the two beasts from her memory, the overly interested and the utterly uninterested, he strikes a balance that suits her perfectly. Plus he's a murderer, most of whom can usually be trusted.

-- Page 17 --

Jason is reclined on the couch when Tara enters, carrying two beers, and sits as closely to his body as is humanly possible, which: why wouldn't you, and starts the very awkward business of acting like a human being just long enough to fool Jason into falling in love with her. Inviting him in, to a place nobody knows about; asking for invitation into his own secret place that she just knows is there. "I don't know why your grandmother was so short with you. You're just trying to protect Sookie." Jason complains: "I hate it when people treat me like I ain't got a lick of sense. Like I'm still just a kid, or... I don't know, in the way." Tara says she knows what that's like. Of course she does. "It sucks, that's what it's like!" She nods sagely. "You feel alone in the world, like nobody understands you, or even sees you." He nods, and really notices she's sitting there, for the first time; she's working overtime to do that thing her cousin does without trying, that thing her best friend can't help doing, that human thing where you listen to somebody and understand them, and then you say something and they understand you. Intimacy. "That ain't right, because everybody is, you know, somebody. ...We're all just trying to be... Trying to be seen, to... To matter." He stretches his body across hers, his legs in her lap, stretching and laughing, settling into the sofa, innocent and intimate at once. "How'd you get to be so smart?"

This part she knows, and so do you: "I'm not smart at all, Jason. I'm not. I am constantly doing things I shouldn't and end up getting me in trouble. I'm a fucking idiot sometimes." That's half the equation, and he fills in the other half: "Well, can I tell you a secret? I am too." That's the deal done, then; the rest is just the math. Showing your work. "It's not that much of a secret," Tara says, as is expected; giving permission. He tickles her there, on the couch, legs entangled, laughing and agreeing. When it's done, she's in his arms, snuggled

down tight into the warmth of him, the length of his body underneath hers. Capable of anything. And just at the last second, just as she's steeled herself for the next step, just as she's about to ask for her invitation, he jumps into the air: "Shit! I was supposed to pick up Dawn from work!" They sit up, he curses, and finishes up his beer -- I guess to help him drive better -- and whines about how she's going to be pissed. (Although, to be fair, by the end of the episode you're going to be a lot more sympathetic to that particular fear.) He calls goodnight to Adele, and alone in the sitting room, Tara laughs ruefully at herself. "...Well, shit." And that's what we call falling completely in love with Tara, because OMG was that a little too close to home.

-- Page 18 --

Bill and Sookie are now wandering through a graveyard. I mean, jury's still out on Bill because he's not that interesting so far -- being mostly at this point a personality-free and imminently projectable floating romantic signifier, like any good sparkly-skinned vampire boyfriend -- and you know I love Sookie to death, but: queer much? "How did your Goth As Fuck date with vampire boyfriend go?" *Oh, we wandered through a graveyard and talked about his long-dead relatives and then we went to his house and read Caitlin Kiernan stories to each other and we watched some flowers die and talked about permanence and evanescence and then we listened to some Evanescence and I painted a little curlicue under my eye and he gave me a silver ankh and then we listened to This Mortal Coil and I made little cuts on my leg and then we put "Trust" by the Cure on repeat like a hundred times and things were getting hot and heavy -- or I guess in this case lukewarm and heavy -- and finally I go "Fuck me like Lestat would" and he's all, "...Up the ass?"*

Sookie backtracks to the whole "glamour somebody into letting you bite them" thing and asks if it's like Tara said, something like hypnosis. He admits that it's similar, and something to which all humans are susceptible. So of course Sookie's two main questions are 1) Is that why I'm into you (no) and 2) Why not give it a shot? He is infinitely uncomfortable with the idea and steps away, and she calls him chicken, because she wants to try all the things there are. There's challenge in her eyes and he laughs at this transparent maneuver, but he goes for it. It is hilarious. He turns suddenly and fixes her with a creepy eye, and steps closer and closer like a snake charmer and she's all breathy and vague and staring and he goes, "Suckie. Can you feel my influence?" It's kind of hot, and he's leaning in, and her lips part, and he's all mojo guy in her face, and finally she cracks up. "No! Not a bit. Sorry!" He's something like bothered by this. "Well, Suckie, this is very strange." She gets in his face, having won like round a hundred, and laughs at him. "You don't like not being able to control people, do you?" She drags him off through the graveyard, skipping along with his hand in hers. "It's not a very attractive trait." He admits that he's taken aback, but only insofar as that humans are generally much more squeamish about vampires. She stops so she can have another memory download and asks how on earth she's supposed to be freaked out by a freak.

-- Page 19 --

Jason and Sookie were playing in the sprinkler, in the yard of a modest home, while Dad worked on the car himself, and Mama sat sunning herself in a lawn chair. Sookie knelt to play with her dolls, and her mother worried. (*How can our car insurance go up so much after just one ticket? Damn it all to hell, I hate having to ask Mama for money...*) "Damn what all to hell?", Sookie asked into the silence. "I can break open my piggy bank if you need some

money." Dad asked her who said they needed money, and Mama swore she hadn't said a word. Mama and Daddy stared at their daughter; Jason watched them stare.

Sookie sat in a school classroom with a psychologist, staring at her amazing face. "Sookie, Do you know why you're here? Your parents, they're concerned about something that can't possibly exist. But you and I are gonna put all this silliness to rest today. Now, can you tell me what I'm thinking? (*I'm thinking about the color red, and the number nine.*)" "The color red and the number nine." The therapist stared at her.

Sookie and Jason sat at a picnic table, and Mama brought their food, explaining that Sookie was just adept at reading body language, and highly observant. "That's a relief," Daddy said. *That's bullshit,* Daddy thought. Jason asked what body language was; one day it'll be the only language he speaks. (*Why was that doctor so scared? Because she was lying to me, that's why. Because there is something to be scared of inside my little girl.*) Sookie looked at her Mama, listening; Jason paid attention to the body language without knowing that's what he was doing, and learned a thing about normal and about what is acceptable, and what we do when the secret truth invades. ...*Oh my God, she knows everything I'm thinking, Mama thought, and was running away before she knew what she was doing. Oh, sweet Jesus. What do I do? Poor child. She can't...* And Sookie watched, and word by word she learned what she was.

"I was diagnosed with ADD. They tried to put me on drugs, but my Mama wouldn't let them. She knew that wasn't it. She tried to protect me. Even though I scared her." Bill asks when Sookie lost her mother, and she explains: "Just before I turned eight. Both my parents. Flash flood." They keep walking; Bill tries to identify. "I lost my wife and my children. Everyone I knew from my human life... Most of them are buried here in this cemetery." Sookie looks at him, trying to figure it out: "You really don't consider yourself human at all?" He's not. It's pretty simple.

-- Page 20 --

Later, they escape the graveyard through an old iron gate, heading toward the Compton house. Sookie asks him if he can turn into a bat -- "There are those who can change form, but I'm not one of them" -- or levitate, or turn invisible. None of the above. "Well Bill, you don't seem like a very good vampire. What *can* you do?" And his answer, I admit, is awesome: "I can bring you back to life." He gives her a shy smile and walks around her; she feels romantic for a bit and then follows him toward the spooky, gorgeous old house.

"This is where you live?" Jesse Compton had no living heirs when he died, so assuming the VRA passes, ownership reverts back to him. (I love this about the VRA because of a Roger MacBride Allen book I was obsessed with in high school called *The Modular Man*, which was entirely about the same legal precedent: assuming immortality, nobody even has to pay estate taxes, so the accumulation of wealth goes virally exponential because the money never changes hands. It didn't go to the Secret Society place in that book, but obviously that's part of what's going on here.) And until then? "Well, I haven't been getting in any trouble with the renovations I've been doing. Although of course I've been doing it myself, in the night. I need an electrician, but I can't get anyone to return my calls." Sookie offers to make some calls in the morning, and bring contact info by after work tomorrow. He thanks her, and considers her again. "Take your clip out." She shakes her hair free, and he looks at her. "May I?" She nods, and he touches her hair, one side and then the other; he looks into her eyes and leans in, turning her face, exposing the soft skin of her neck. He smells her hair

and she closes her eyes, his breath on her skin, and he kisses her neck. She turns to kiss him, but he just stares down at her. "I can smell the sunlight on your skin," he says. There's sadness in it. He steps back, and she grabs his head awesomely, bringing it in for a proper kiss. After a moment or two she gasps and pulls back: his fangs are out. He doesn't even have a schoolbook to hide it; he feels creepy about it. "I should see you home," he says apologetically, willing his fangs to go down again, reciting antebellum sports scores in his undead head. She doesn't protest.

Dawn. She's putting her makeup on for work as the sun comes up; Jason whines somewhere behind her. "What's the matter, baby? Don't you like me?" In the mirror you can see it's not a metaphor: "Oh, sure I like you, Jason. I wouldn't tie any old man up to my bed." His arms are tied above his head with scarves; he is naked, as is to be expected, and tells her Sam won't mind if she calls in sick. "One, Sam would mind. And two, we've had sex like three times today. At this rate, we're gonna burn out by the end of the week, and then you're gonna get all weird and closed-off, and I've already been down that road with you, baby." Okay, Dawn's pretty awesome too. She climbs atop him and looks down archly. "But I'm horny!" he fairly shouts, and she laughs indulgently. "Well, I'll be back by midnight." He whines a bit more and she fakes sympathy. "You just better be happy that's all I'm doing to you, baby." She kisses him and tells him to think of it as foreplay as she climbs slowly off the bed, offering a good view of her ass. He doesn't really start to panic until he hears the car door slam, and the engine start up.

-- Page 21 --

That night, a middle-aged woman with faded makeup and low self-esteem, calls out to Tara: "Hey sugar, make Mom another stinger, would you?" Poor choice of words; Tara jumps on her viciously but she can barely focus on Tara's face. "You listen to me, Jane Boathouse. You're already drunk as a skunk. Ain't no man in here gonna wanna take you home. Sam will have to call your son to come and get you just like he always does, even though everybody knows it humiliates him to death. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" Jane stares at her hazily, forming words. "What'd you just say to me?" Tara sucks on her lollipop and bats her eyelashes. "I said, any particular brand of cognac?" Jane sighs. "No. Whatever you have that's nice. And cheap."

Going past, Sam reminds her that he told her to buy a uniform; she asks why he doesn't wear one. "Because I own this place and wear what I want." Well what about Terry Bellefleur? "I've spent enough time in uniforms," Terry snickers, but Tara shakes her head. "No. Because you're a man, and Sam don't feel the need to sexualize the men in his employment the same way he do the women." Exasperated, Sam gives her leave to ignore the uniform policy, and she thanks him kindly. "Remind me why I hired you again?" She smiles. "Affirmative action." It makes Terry laugh, at least, and he's still laughing when she brings Jane her drink.

Sookie brings a table of stupid young studs their loaded skins and pitcher of beer, and asks if that's all they want. (...*Serve them nachos offa them perfect titties, we'd all be mighty obliged. Ain't nothing I like more than lickin' food off...*) She nods abruptly and leaves, and as she turns to go -- (...*girls tits and ... that's a fine ass, too...*) He reaches out and squeezes Sookie's bottom; Rene appears out of nowhere and twists the kid's arm behind his back. "You wanna let go of the lady, you? Or you want me to knock you into next week?" The kid whines that he's about to break his arm, and Rene tells him to apologize. "Maybe you and your friends should find someplace else to eat, yeah." As they file out, Rene stares one down: "Don't

look at me, you." When they're gone, Sookie tells Rene he should have let her handle it herself, but he pays it no mind. "Ahh, Merlotte's is a nice place, and we all want to keep it that way. And besides, you remind me of my baby sister, you." He pushes her hair off her forehead. "I hope to God that somebody will stick up for her if some asshole ever does her that way." She smiles weakly and leaves, weirdly; Rene wonders if she's retarded after all, and busses their pitcher of Bud.

-- Page 22 --

In the kitchen, Sookie asks Arlene to thank her boyfriend for helping her out. "I was so flustered I think I might have seemed ungrateful." (*Please let me get my period tonight... Even though Rene wants one of his own... I sure don't want him to feel like he's being forced into...*) Sookie grabs Arlene, throwing her arms around her without a second thought. "Did you just read my mind?" Arlene asks, pushing her away. Sookie apologizes and explains she's off her game tonight. "My private thoughts are none of your business!" She runs away, and Sam appears, calling Sookie into his office.

"I swear I try not to listen, but I can't always keep my guard up..." Sam asks her if it's true, and she can't hear Bill at all. She gives a tiny nod, and he smiles for her. "God, that's... I mean, that must be very relaxing for you. You know, not having to work so hard not to hear." He's so sweet; she nods at him. He gets it. He smiles and asks if she can hear him; she'd die before admitting she already has, and recoiled from him. The way he smelled her, the strength of his love. There's a picture on the wall between them, a painting, but it's out of focus. "I don't want to hear you," she grins coyly. "I'd have to quit if I read your mind, and I like it here." He promises she wouldn't, but she shakes her head. "I've had to leave every job I've ever had because I could hear my boss' thoughts." Inexpertly, pushing her -- What's the use of having the power to have conversations without saying anything, if not to get past the scary parts? The terror of intimacy is trust, but without the ability to lie there's no fear in trust -- "You might be surprised by what you find." She tries to be smooth, too. "Not all surprises are good," she says, closing the book on it, but he's not done: "Try sometime!" The mysterious painting throbs behind her, on the wall. She smiles at him, he wants her to... Finally he taps her knee, breaking the spell. "Now listen, don't you worry. You got a job here as long as you want one." She smiles at him; the presence of his feelings for her fill the room. "I should get back to work." She hops up, and the picture on the wall *finally* comes into focus, a fairytale image: the wakeful collie, watching over the sleeping girl. The beautiful and the faithful, together forever. We all just want to be seen. To matter. She leaves and he puts embarrassed head into useless hands. "Come! On!"

She scoots past the kitchen; Lafayette calls out to her. "Baby girl, don't even let that get you down!" She's still unsure about Lafayette; he's Tara's cousin and her coworker, but he says things that are true and crude and frightening. He's a guide but she can't see that yet, because he's a guide to a world she's spent her life ignoring. "Don't let *what* get me down?" Why fall in love with a dead man unless you're afraid of the living? And there's nobody more living than Lafayette; he lives more lives than most of us ever will. "Don't let *nothing* get you down," he says, fanning himself. "It's the only way to live," he says, kicking one ironic, parodic heel in the air, Prior Walter for a moment and someone else the next. There's such ill-earned wisdom, such lofty sadness in this latest truth. He knows; the encyclopedia of things that don't get him down, half the things in it she can't even spell yet. Sookie leaves, not entirely convinced yet about Lafayette's awesomeness. But just like Sam, and the dog, and now Bill, just like Tara and Gran and Jason, he'll be there the moment that she needs

him. That's how guides work. "Ain't that right, Big John?" You actually get a glimpse of the inordinately agreeable Big John for a second, running something to the stove: "Right."

-- Page 23 --

Tara casually asks Dawn how Jason's doing, just making conversation, and Dawn laughs to herself about how he's probably pretty pissed at her right about how. "You know, I have to say I... I'm surprised you and him got back together," says Tara. Oh, Tara. High school must have been really bad for Tara, if she's still this cruddy at this game. "No more than I am, baby. Believe me," Dawn says easily. Tara asks if it's going to last, and Dawn asks if there's a reason she's asking. Tara pushes, all wrong, completely outmatched: "No. But ever since I've been friends with Sookie, I've just gotten a kick out of watching Jason's escapades with women, you know..." Tara! You can't play Mean Girls with an actual Mean Girl. Stick with fat white ladies and your boss and work your way up. Dawn rolls her eyes: "Mm-hmm." She turns to go, without taking her eyes off Tara: "Sort of." She cackles at the fumble as she goes; it's not even cruel, it's not even about disliking Tara or being jealous about Jason, it's just: *For real?* So: Dawn 2, Tara 0.5. Maybe forever.

Sookie heads back onto the floor, but doesn't even get back to her tables before the TV catches her attention: a tragic car crash in Dallas claimed three lives today. "Theodore Newlin, his wife Yvette, and their 18-month-old daughter, Bethany... All pronounced dead on arrival at Baylor University Medical Center." Sookie stares, swallows. The Rattrays were one thing, but now it's just getting sloppy. Nan Flanagan, I expected better from you. "...total of seven other casualties as well in the freak accident, apparently caused when a..." Cut to Sookie's car zooming toward the Compton house.

The lights are on on the bottom floor, some industrial Goth As Fuck music's playing as she walks toward the house. There's a truck parked outside, license plate FANGS 1, stickers including *VAMPIRES SUCK* and *HONK IF YOU'RE A BLOOD DONOR*. She walks toward the house with the electrician's contact info in her hand and the scariest question yet in her throat. She looks at the doorbell, the window by the door, stalls for awhile, and finally as she's reaching out to knock, the door opens. It's a hot black chick in '70s disco wear: gold lame flashdance shirt, giant black rose-colored afro, giant hoops. She leans against the doorframe intimidatingly, and smiles. "Well hey there, little human chick." Sookie does her best not to be terrified, and states her business. She asks if he's there, and the woman says, "Maybe." Then: the dumbest thing ever. This total tool with a goatee and *ridiculous* accent appears wearing blood-colored silk, like some kind of polyamorous LARPer dork, and goes, "Mmmmm. She smells... fresh..." They both fang up, and then suddenly behind Sookie is that same drama queen tattoo guy, with his tongue going nuts and his eyes rolling off to opposite sides and they're all acting like the Dilophosaurus in *Jurassic Park*, right? The ones that ate Newman. And you know what, even that could still be awesome if, next week, some cool vampires immediately show up and give them vampire wedgies. I'm not ruling that out.

## THE STACKHOUSE FILIBUSTER

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 3 | Aired on 09.21.2008

*Mine* - Sookie realizes the downside to dating dead guys, as does Naked Jason; Tara makes a new friend; Dawn meets an ugly fate.

If you liked the awkward, haphazard honesty of the Fishers and their assorted loved ones on [Six Feet Under](#), let me tell you that you are about to shoot into awkward, haphazard hyperdrive. What a fucking lovely, perfect, cheesy, hilarious, loving, compassionate, scary view of love and sex and nature at the *nth* level. Asleep, awake, alive or dead, apparently telling the truth has spread from Tara to everybody. Needless to say, Tara continues to be the total greatest of all time ever in the history of the universe.

We pick up on last week's cliffhanger with Sookie telling the super-scary vampfang gothtards to stow it because she's not susceptible, then the impromptu vampire party at Bill's house gets all cheesy vamp-FF and bisexual and blowjobby, then Bill tells everybody to quit acting like stupid ridiculous vampires. Then he talks all Civil Warlike, and you start to figure out that Bill's a lot hotter when he's not talking like he's reading from a Bowdlerized copy of *Vanity Fair*. Sookie tells him to take a long walk in the sun and leaves, but dreams that she's totally bored of being a virgin and tells Bill so, but wakes up before they bone because she's a total virgin and doesn't know what happens next. In the end, they're kind of dating again although I don't know if Bill's aware of that.

Awakingly, Adele is even ten times prettier and more senile-slash-hilarious-slash-insightful than before and continues to be totally awesome: strip-mall coffee is good for you, Sookie's boyfriend is a totally cute murderer who cannot legally wed and drinks blood, Sookie needs a boyfriend with an opaque brain, Adele's husband had the same psychic shit going on, isn't being psychic fucked up due to "everybody's dark secrets," but it also saves lives so it's good, so grow the eff up, because it's never as easy as 1 or 0.

As per usual, Jason's the most interesting storyline. He gets out of his cliffhanger restraints and jumps Dawn in a Nagel dressing gown and elbow-length gloves, pretending to be the serial killer. Dawn is into it, so his whole reveal -- plus his sudden gay/vampire/whatever-panic related impotence, plus his disinclination to take off the creepy velvet gloves while they're trying to fuck -- is awesomely stupid enough that she gets her gun out and starts shooting it all around, making her the coolest person of the week. I guess of all the billion other metaphors that vampirism now represents, we're also in *Pleasantville* and fangbanging (IT'S ERIC I KNOW IT'S YOU ERIC I LOVE YOU ERIC SEE YOU NEXT WEEK ERIC) is just one more way of figuring out your total Joan Allen awesomeness and shooting at Jason Stackhouse, who frankly deserves it. Mostly, he is naked and having weird hallucinations of fucking that one horrible tattoo loser vampire when he's supposed to be fucking Dawn. Color us both (not) shocked and relieved, not to mention in total gay love with gun-toting Dawn. Meaning that there is literally nobody on this show that isn't totally awesome.

Anyway, speaking of forthrightly announcing your sex stuff like some kind of socially impaired weirdo instead of approaching other people in a way that suggests you are relatively sane, Tara explains to Sam that it's probably best that they fuck. Sam, being the

hottest dude on this show, takes some convincing, but eventually bones her. It is awesome. Bonus: He snarfs and barks in his sleep as though he were an obviously-telegraphed shapeshifting collie. (Who, like Pluto and Goofy, owns a pet dog of his own! Freakout fakeout!) Next day, Tara realizes that while her mom is close to being just like your average horrific alcoholic mom, she is maybe as full of Satan as she is of liquor. I hope she kills the bitch, frankly. Tara heads over to Lafayette's house, where he gets her stoned and introduces her to his lover, a Louisiana state senator. That should have pain-free consequences!

Later, Jason shows up at Lafayette's house, evidencing a totally awesome longstanding relationship based on mutual respect and adoration, not to mention that Lafayette is a crack dealer of all kinds. Turns out L sells v-juice, and knows it's just the thing for what ails our Jason. And normally I would cry foul, but my goodness is this shit exactly what Jason needs, because L's a guide, and any tool is a weapon if you hold it right, including drugs. Jason's going to have to walk this whole trail to come out the other side, which we knew the first time we met him. It's nice, honestly: Lafayette and Sookie is a house that's not been built yet, but Lafayette and Jason is a house with basements we'll never see. Then there's some straight-boy porn, which is to say "this is a scene with Jason Stackhouse in it," Sookie decides it's appropriate to masturbate on her front porch, Sam interrupts said proceedings and sends her to Dawn's house, who I am guessing is... And yeah. Dead as shit. Later, Dawn.

Next week: WHO CARES IT'S ERIC I LOVE YOU ERIC SHUT UP EVERYBODY LOOK IT'S ERIC

*Discuss this episode in our [forums](#), then see where you know Sheriff Dearborne from in our guide to this fall's [Familiar Faces](#)!*

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

We pick back up on Bill's porch with the two ridiculous vampires in the doorway and the bald one behind Sookie with his tongue going the usual amount of crazy. His name is Liam, the Foxy Brown one is Diane, and the goatee one with the silly accent is Malcolm (an unrecognizable [Agent Schlatter](#), last seen experiencing the joys of home improvement first-hand on *Weeds*). He invites Sookie inside with all kinds of hypnotism happening in his eyeballs, and Diane is also shooting brain lasers, and finally Sookie's like, "Hey, are you trying to glamour me?" They pull up short and look at each other, and Malcolm's like, "...Yes?" She informs them, in her Liddell way, that it doesn't work on her, and Liam blurts, "Why not?" She turns back to him like this is a conversation people have, all, "I dunno, but whatever." Everybody stares at everybody else, completely flummoxed by her implacability as usual, and finally she just asks if Bill's around. His voice echoes out into the foyer as he commands them to let her in. Diane leans in, all creepy, and he barks: "Diane! Let her in." Disappointed, Diane's like, "Oh, fuck him." Malcolm giggles that she already did. I kind of love Malcolm.

As ridiculous and OTT as they are, I like them, because their props and clothes and activities pretty much span every kind of vampire we've ever seen; it's a neat twist. Malcolm is Vamp Classic, all pretension and image; Diane is the Vamp Madonna, spanning looks and personae from blaxploitation to her Jewelle Gomez/Billie Holiday roots; Liam is the postapocalyptic redneck fratboy Vamp Bubba. Just like everybody else on the show, they're trying to find somebody to be and how it fits with who they are and who they used to be. Everybody's in costume; everybody's wearing a mask in front of a camera, all the time. There's something inherently lame about vampires because they are always these drowsy bisexual

polyamorous drama queens, but here it's a double-twist because no matter how hilariously lame they are -- to say nothing of the whoosh sound they make when they zoom around -- they will still kill your ass and suck your blood, and that's scary.

Sookie enters, Malcolm and Diane on either side of her; Diane darts in for a quick lick of her face, and then laughs all crazy. Diane continues to laugh like an insane four-year-old playing dressup for the rest of the scene, and in fact whenever she's onscreen. Unnecessarily, Malcolm does the fangzoom over to the door, closing it behind her. In the parlor, there's a butterface heroin girl strung out on one couch, and a gogo boy with an insane body and cutoffs lounging on the other. Bill sits in the corner in shadow.

-- Page 2 --

While Liam and Diane attempt to be menacing, touching her hair and sniffing her and generally acting like dogs at the pound, and Malcolm darkly loiters, Sookie asks them to give her a moment with Bill. Diane and Liam agree that she smells "fuckin' sweet," and Malcolm -- who is now acting something approaching normal, comparatively -- laughs at Bill. "Just five minutes ago you were telling us how you were living mainly on synthetic blood, you big poseur." Diane offers the opinion that Sookie's not a snack, and possibly a virgin, which of course pisses Sookie off: "That's none of your damn business, you nosy bitch." And Bill sits in the corner, watching how she does this. He's the camera, but she's not wearing a mask.

Diane grabs her head and calls her "cupcake," explaining that virgin blood is the best-tasting blood there is... second to baby blood. Liam pulls Sookie up against his crotch, talking about how hard he gets just thinking about baby blood. That is troubling, y'all. Malcolm, zoomiest of all vampires, reaches around and exposes Sookie's neck for Liam, so their arms are all wrapped around her and each other. They are incestuous and touch-hungry, like band geeks. "Ladies first," he chuckles, and when Diane leans down, Bill finally stands up. Everybody stares at him. "Stop! Suckie is mine."

After the excellent credits, Malcolm apologizes and backs off. The smackwhore on the couch is the unspeaking Janella, apparently your basic fangbanging familiar on her way to a bad end; she's interesting mostly because she looks scarier than any creature of the night. "That's why I always bring Jerry with me, wherever I go. He's like mad money!" He takes the gogo boy by the wrist and sits down; Jerry straddles him and snuggles in tight. "Somebody needs to get down on m'johnson," Liam says matter-of-factly, and Janella finally rises from the couch and shambles over to commence. Sookie is, of course, appalled by everything that is happening in the room, which Diane finds hilarious.

Bill reiterates, to Diane's irritation and Sookie's, about how Sookie is his, and Diane asks why she's not over in the corner servicing him: "Can't you see how hungry he is?" Malcolm looks up from Jerry's neck helpfully: "Uh Bill, if you're hungry you're more than welcome to have some of Jerry..." He taps Jerry's giant muscley back and Jerry stands up, considering Bill. Malcolm smiles, Diane laughs, Jerry prances across the room in his tiny shorts and collapses languidly against the other couch, breathing hard, stretching out an arm and offering his neck. It's all very vampire-oriented. Liam, on the other side of the room, draws a pretty obvious connection here, talking simultaneously to Janella and Bill when he grunts, "Come on, suck it!"

-- Page 3 --

Jerry leans back hungrily as Bill lowers toward him, fangs out, with an eye on Sookie either measuring or apologizing: (*Stick 'em in already and get infected, you fucking vampire asshole. Come on, do it, let's see how you like Hep D. You fuckers won't be able to move for like a year...*) Sookie screams at Bill to stop, and then asks what Hep D is. Jerry rushes her, screaming, and puts his hands around her throat. (*How does she know? There's no way, I didn't tell a soul...*) "These fuckers killed Marcus!" he screams, and remembers Marcus leaving, hooked on V, while he cried. (*We would've been...*) Bill zooms over and breaks Jerry's wrist getting him off her; everybody zooms around and Sookie coughs roughly while Liam comes really loudly across the room. These people.

Malcolm knows when it's time to make your exit, which is one point in his favor. "...Well! This has all been very illuminating, but we've got a long ride back to Monroe, and I'm sure we'll all wanna have a little talk with Jerry when he wakes up." He picks Jerry's gigantic hot self and throws him over a shoulder easily. "Out, Janella. We're being evicted." (I have a question and I don't really want to ask it but ... it's actually a two-parter having to do with A) the magical effects of vampire bodily fluids and B) whether Janella swallows, and I can't come up with a decent way to ask the question so I guess we'll find out, plus honestly the way things are going, probably Jason Stackhouse will be the one to find out, so we'll explore this then, I guess, if we have to go there at all, which ... really we don't, ever.)

The boys head toward the door with Janella, and Diane's like, "HEY! Isn't anyone even the slightest bit interested in how this little bitch knew about Jerry?" Bill leans down and tenderly tells Sookie to shut the fuck up: "You can't speak yet, can you sweetheart?" Diane offers to make her talk, and they revisit the previous reiteration about how Suckie is Bill's, for the third time in five minutes. Heading out, Malcolm is hilariously irritated: "Jerry, you stupid bitch! Nobody fucks with me and gets away with it." I love how Malcolm is at once the biggest tryhard of the bunch, and yet issues every statement with this totally normal human intonation.

Alone, Bill takes her face in his hands and then lifts her to sitting on the pivot on one skinny finger. It looks cooler than most of the phang-physics shots we've seen. She pulls away and they both stare into separate distances; he eventually stands up and wanders around, checking out the floor and eventually speaking: "I'm sorry you had to witness that. Their visit was unexpected." (You know what? I kind of hate Bill. Not the character exactly, but just ... the way that he talks is excruciating to me. Especially when it's total exposition like this, because it's ten times more ponderous when he's issuing it in this weirdly enunciated, weirdly emphasized accent from the country of Antebellumnia. I respect this actor's process and I'm not saying it's a lack of craft or whatever, he's got the physicality and body language right, it's just the voice itself that bugs me. Like how no matter how cool and sincere Zach Braff is, I still want to punch his face.)

-- Page 4 --

"Hepatitis D is the only blood-borne pathogen to which we are susceptible. Malcolm must be furious... A mutation -- relatively harmless to humans, oddly enough." (See? Like this.) No actor could credibly sell that chunk, but you're adding insult to injury with the voice.) Sookie admits she's never heard of that strain, and Bill smiles because of course they kept it out of the media. "And it makes you sick for a year?", she says, fascinated. No, that's one thing on a very long list of the myriad things Jerry was confused about. More like a month. "The biggest danger to us from Hep D is being captured and staked during that time." Sookie's not loving the implications here of the whole "we control the vertical" thing he

just said, given that she came over tonight in the first place because she just figured out the shadowy vampire conspiracy that killed the racist Reverend Newlin in Dallas earlier, and quotes Bill back to himself about how they don't want their weaknesses to be public knowledge. He's like, "You're getting it now! Precisely!" She's like, oh, so not the point.

"-- And what the hell did you mean, Sookie is mine?" Bill exposites some more about how this was about communicating (and recommunicating and reiterating said recommunication) to the others that she's "his" human, and therefore only he can feed on her. "You most certainly cannot feed on me!" Sookie shrieks, standing up. Bill's all, "Well of course I can't, Sookie, but had they known that they'd have considered you fair game! I wouldn't have been able to stop them from attacking you. It'd be three against one, and Malcolm is much older than I am, and quite strong." Sookie keeps running down the list in decreasing order of ickiness: "And ... you and Diane dated?" Bill admits they had sex, once: "Just after she was made a vampire, back in the late 1930s," and Sookie is hilarious: "What? Gross!"

She explains that this is gross mostly because Diane, and her compatriots, are totally mean. Bill agrees: "Evil? Yes, they are. They share a nest, and when vampires live in nests they become more cruel, more vicious. They become laws unto themselves. Whereas vampires such as I, who live alone, are much more likely to hang onto some semblance of our former humanity." Sookie's like, "Yeah, and you're doing a bangup job with that, Chief." She hands over the contact info for two electricians willing to come give him quotes at night, and she backs up, ready to bounce. "May I kiss you goodnight?" A world of no. "I couldn't stand it after them." She leaves, and he makes a very intense face. Guess she failed the test.

-- Page 5 --

Sam's stocking the bar, closing up for the night; he and Tara say goodnight to Dawn and Tara asks for a beer, saying she can't go home yet. She tips it way back. "Sam? You think Sookie's getting serious about that vampire?" Sam doesn't really want to talk about it, and keeps working as he plays it off: "I think she's getting to know him. And once she does, I don't think she'll be getting too serious about him." Tara piques his interest by noting that Bill seems to be getting "pretty damn serious" on his own dime, and tells him how Bill showed up at Adele's house last night "all cleaned up and smellin' nice, lookin' like he just stepped out of some piece of shit movie about plantations and shit. Do you know he actually owned slaves?"

(It didn't click for me last week, but this is actually a totally interesting question. They're real people, not history -- they're like time travelers. And while you might not necessarily hold a history person from the Olden Days accountable for everything, given context and culture and all that -- [Mad Men](#) is only moderately horrifying because it stays in its box fifty years old -- you'd be hard-pressed to give the same out to somebody who'd actually lived through the intervening centuries. And by the same token, no matter how much TruBlood you drink, your history of murder still follows you. Even the most recovered addict still has a thing hanging over his head; even the most reformed abusive ex-boyfriend is still a guy with history. So what I read last week as Tara being oppositional and weird -- which she was being with Gran, if not Bill -- is a little more textured than that, because it's a fairly fascinating part of the What If. What If Bill not only owned slaves, but owned a slave in Tara's bloodline? Or Rene's? Would that make him better? Worse? Do people actually change? Do we trust epiphanies? Do we need people who have crossed lines -- adulterers,

killers, ex-cons, sex offenders -- to always be a little bit sad about their past, so we can stay firmly on the high ground?)

"Least he could've done was apologize to me," she mutters, and Sam asks how Adele felt about vampires up in her parlor. Tara remembers how weird that was: "Sam, she seemed like she was in seventh heaven. It was fuckin' weird." He groans to himself and she stares him down: "You know you don't have anybody to blame but yourself." He avoids her gaze, even as she's pointing out that his "big one" for Sookie has been apparent as long as he's been around. Sam protests that it's none of her business, but she's on a roll. "She's always been peculiar around men, I mean, she's not gonna make the first move." Sam gets uptight and reminds her of their working relationship, but hey: she's off the clock. "Aw come on, Sam. Don't even try to pull any of that working for the man shit with me. You should've said something, and you know it. How come you never have?" Sam rises to the occasion and asks point-blank why she's never said anything to Jason Stackhouse. And, now that he's gone to the Tara place, her respect for him rises accordingly. She tells the truth, and she laughs as she does.

-- Page 6 --

"Because I'm comfortable with him being right where he is, which is unattainable. Which is part of my whole fucked-up thing. Low self-esteem, childhood trauma, blah-blah, snore. What's your excuse?" Sam shrinks from it and says not everybody likes to lay their guts on the table like that. "Yeah, they might not like it, but they all dream about finding somebody they can do it with." They both drink, because true stuff is louder than other stuff.

One of the best things about this episode is how deftly it furthers the theme of Tara and Sookie mirroring each other all the time: almost every scene has its double in the other's day. Like here, Tara's pushing for intimacy for the first time we've seen, while Sookie's backing off Bill as quickly as her fine ass can move -- but they both want the exact same thing, and are denied that thing by the same fears and afflictions. Hearing other people unfiltered, unavoidable intimacy, is what drives Sookie crazy; hearing herself unfiltered, unavoidable introspection, is what makes Tara crazy.

I think when all is said and done, I will love Tara most for her rage, because it comes straight out of her intelligence and the fact that the opportunities and circumstances she finds herself in are nothing like what she deserves. She should be a CEO or a famous standup, not a waitress. And every assumption you can make about her, pushing in at her all the time... Just because we can't hear them doesn't mean the impressions and pressures of everybody else aren't constantly pushing at us, trying to make us into objects and change us and tear us down. Do you think there's really a difference between Sookie hearing some guy think about her tits and Tara seeing somebody obviously staring at hers? Being Sookie is exactly like being a woman.

"Funny thing is, I kind of did let Sookie know, for the first time night before last. Not even a minute before that vampire walked in my front door." Huh. So was he playing her? Was that half-intentional, with extra you-smell-so-good stuff on top? I like that. I like the idea of him using her power to say things he can't say, considering how many times in this episode people find unorthodox ways of expressing the stuff they can't say. And the fact that he knows damn well how much Sookie must love the silence, which entire conversation we've apparently forgotten this week.

Tara says, "If I were you, I would get in there right now while you still got a shot," and he reminds her that, according to herself five seconds ago, she certainly would not. She drinks to that, because he's right, and he looks at her while he thinks, quietly being totally hot, before telling her the part about the silence. Tara's surprised to know Sookie can't read Bill, but not surprised about the implications: "That explains everything!" Sam tries to explain about how he told her not to worry about hearing his thoughts, and Tara's like, "No way, Mr. Intimacy." She explains that this is the opposite of what Sookie wants: "She wants to *not* hear them. That requires constant work on her part." She reminds him of what he said like two days ago, which is that this makes Bill awesome. "Aw man, you don't stand a chance, I'm really sorry but you don't," she laughs, and he tells her to go home again; she tells him again that she can't, and wanders out into the bar.

-- Page 7 --

Dawn gets out of her car at home, laughing and excited about the totally hot dude tied to her bedposts; she runs straight to the bedroom. The bed's empty, and she's disappointed for a moment before he grabs her. It's the killer! He's wearing a hilarious '80s-print shortie robe, black with hot pink abstract shapes, black elbow-length gloves, and something over his whole head, erasing his face, replacing it with nothing. "You kept me waiting," it says, and Dawn gasps. "I don't like to wait. I need to taste you again." Dawn tries to get the adrenaline under control and tell Jason to cut it out -- because who else would be in her house, even talking in this bizarre *Batman* voice?

It pulls her head back, makes her scream, throws her on the bed: "I probably should've told you I've got a highly addictive nature... I'm gonna get some more of that sweet stuff out of you. I guess you don't have too much of a problem with that... Don't fight me, because I will hurt you. What are you to me? Just another idiot slut who puts out for vampires." Under the weight of it, Dawn lies still, panicking, and it realizes she's responding, dealing with the situation. "Oh yeah, here we go. I know you liked it." She strains, up, against him. "Slow down, I'm in no hurry. I just drained that poor fuck you left tied up to the bed. Very considerate of you, by the way..."

She stops straining and goes back to resisting, screaming, "Oh, God! Where is he?" The killer asks which part of him she means, and Dawn speaks into muffled hands, erasing her face, replacing it with nothing: "This isn't happening!" The killer admits it didn't have a choice: "You laid him out like an all-you-can-eat buffet!" She crawls away, back across the bed, and the killer laughs, "Although he did put up quite a fight..." And the killer laughs, and takes off its mask. Jason does a little dance.

Dawn hits him in the chest, babbling: "You! That is not funny. That is not funny! You..." Jason laughs at her and tells her to think of it as foreplay, like tying a poor horny boy up and leaving him alone all day. She slaps him, and he tells her to do it again; she starts to smile and his voice gets insistent: "Do it again." He takes off the robe, but leaves the gloves on. "Give me some of that sweet stuff... Raahhh!" he says, in the killer's voice, and they laugh together, and make love.

Sookie parks outside Adele's and takes a moment to chill out as she wipes her tears away. All that adrenaline. Plus the loss of her brand new romance, turning her back on her first-ever boyfriend, everybody turning out right. They're from two different worlds: the night, and the day. She never should have... He's standing in front of her, on the porch, out of nowhere. "Goddamn it, Bill! How many times do I have to tell you, do not do that?" How much more

seriously do I have to explain how much I love the silence but hate the blind spot that comes with it? How can I explain the intimacy that comes with invitation? He apologizes. "It wasn't intentional. I just got here. I wanted to make sure that you were safe," he says, coming down her stairs to where she's standing, arms crossed. Things go silent, the world fades away, the crickets go quiet, as she listens; they return again. "Why can't I hear your thoughts? Do you even have any thoughts?" Nice!

-- Page 8 --

Bill explains some things in a totally off-putting speech. I have no problem suspending my disbelief for any of this; it's suspending my disbelief of the words coming out of his mouth being authentic in any way. Maybe he's lying and this is all some kind of amazing actor trick, but I don't think so. I think it's a perfect storm of bad expositional dialogue that's impossible to speak aloud with any kind of conviction, asking your actor to do a weird accent on top of saying these impossible things, and maybe having an actor who thinks these lines are as stupid as ... they actually are. So Bill says he has thoughts -- "many lifetimes of thoughts," in fact -- but maybe Sookie can't hear them because he doesn't have "brain waves," because he's dead, no heartbeat, no breathing, no electrical impulses in his body: "What animates you no longer animates me." I don't think what animates Sookie Stackhouse ever animated you, Compton.

Sookie does that thing she does where she gets so fascinated she forgets to be angry or freaked out: "What does animate you, then? ...Blood? How do you digest it if nothing works?" Bill offers the suggestion that it's "magic," pissing Sookie off to no end, but he's not being condescending. At least not the way she thinks: "You think that it's not magic that keeps you alive? Just 'cause you understand the mechanics of how something works doesn't make it any less of a miracle. Which is just another word for magic. We're all kept alive by magic, Suckie. My magic's just a little different from yours, that's all." Um okay, Deepak. If any real person gave me some patronizing, slippery slope, meaningless sentimental phrase-stuffed bullshit speech like that, I would dump him immediately. Mostly in order to feel less bad about punching my boyfriend, subsequently. Let's see what Sookie does. "I think we need to stop seeing each other."

And without even a moment's hesitation, he screams. "Why!?" It sounds like a bark, like an injured beast. He's scary and weird and talks stupid, and some but not all of that "Suckie is mine" stuff was not pretend. "Because you don't breathe, you don't have any electrical whatever-it-is, your friends would like to rip my throat out, and because vampires killed that preacher from the Fellowship of the Sun Church and his wife and baby. You look me in the eye and tell me they didn't do it." Bill gets all pissy about how "humans have killed millions upon millions in senseless wars. I do not hold you responsible for that." Um, did you notice how exactly one of those five excellent reasons for dumping you actually were about you specifically? And how you just added one more by completely validating my conspiracy theories by rolling your eyes and sidestepping the question?

-- Page 9 --

"Bill. Night before last, I had to bury my bloody clothes because I didn't want my grandmother to find out I was almost killed. And tonight I was almost killed again. Why on earth would I continue seeing you?" Bill comes up the stairs, bearing down on her with his eyes, manipulative and scared and mean: "Because you will never find a human man you can be yourself with." She shakes her head and turns to go, and he tries to stop her.

"Suckie..." She whirls, and tells him not to touch her. "Just go, please." She closes the door in his face, and he breathes, and continues to be menacing and creepy and dumb. I don't know guys, maybe he really is in love with her.

Sam and Tara have moved to the porch for drink #2, and Sam finally asks why she's not going home. "This right here," she says, and he laughs, confused. "My mama's a drunk. Not just a slurs-her-words drunk, a waking-up-in-her-own-vomit kind of drunk." Your mom's a college freshman? Don't worry about it! "I just can't be around her when she's gone like that... I know she may end up dying... Lighting herself on fire with a lit cigarette... but I can't. I won't." She laughs awkwardly and points out that guilt compounds the horror of the situation in the first place. He asks why she doesn't get her own place and she flips it on him, as usual, like a ninja: "Why don't you give me a raise?" They laugh as though this is a conversation they've had a million times before, even though he hired her ... two shifts ago? Sam asks if Mama's ever tried AA, and Tara's awesome: "She doesn't need AA, Sam, she's got Jesus." He's like, Gotcha. I think this is the moment Tara decides to fuck him. It'll take her an hour to get there, but she's sure. Being Tara Thornton is like being a woman, too.

She asks permission to ask him a personal question, and he charmingly downs his drink before allowing it. "Are you lonely?" Man! You know who needs a little Jesus? Tara. Girl's not right. "...Yes. I am, I am very... very lonely." He is; it's written all over his gorgeous furry face. "How come you don't have a girlfriend?" He laughs, but she's serious: "You're hot, you have a job, you're not a serial killer..." (OR IS HE? HE OWNS GLOVES.) Sam asks her, then, why she doesn't have a boyfriend. This is like watching tennis, only the people are naked. She arbitrarily decides that we're only talking about Sam's life right now, and he looks out into the night. "Yeah, well... I have a hard time opening up, that's all." Tara asks a rhetorical question: "Please, what have you got to hide that's so fucking bad --" he looks at her sharply, taking it let's say less-than-rhetorically, "-- in this fucking town?" But that's not her burden, it's his, and he reiterates he's not going to open up.

-- Page 10 --

"Don't you ever get horny?" (Needs! Jesus!) Sam's half-assed attempt to be scandalized falls by the wayside and he admits that yes, of course, he has needs. "How long has it been since you've had sex?" Sam laughs, after a moment, but I mean, I love this so much, because the acting's so good that you can actually see this plan forming, moment to moment. A boy who can't be heard with a girl who can't really be seen, moving further and further apart; a girl and boy in love with other people, laying themselves open like this, negotiating closer and closer. Like the naked tennis just turned into naked paintball. Trying to score without being seen. He admits it's been a while, and watches her face as she commiserates, and asks how long it's been for her. Eight months and three weeks. They laugh together, noticing the things they have in common: Men and women have been doing this forever. Sam offers her another beer.

"Are you kidding? I'm an adult child of an alcoholic, I'll need at least three more." Maybe the reason Sookie loves Tara is because of her complete lack of filter, the raw wound that is her mouth; she's the anti-Bill, but they both mean no effort, to hide. Tara is no masks and no cameras, just this unceasing update on Things We Don't Talk About. And when Sam goes to get her next drink, she takes her hair down, and thinks about whether this is betrayal, of herself if nothing else, taking Sookie's castoffs. If anybody's actually capable of having sex without strings attached. Sam's a romantic, isn't he? Don't boys want what they can't have? Why the filibuster? Can't we just want things?

"So maybe you and I should sleep together," she says, following him, watching him laugh, gauging him every second. "I mean, we're grownups. No strings. Friends with benefits." He protests that she's his employee and she laughs in his face: "Sam! Aren't you sick of not getting laid? I know I am. D'you have condoms?" Sam's amazed, and just keeps repeating what a terrible idea it is. That he's going to walk into, once she's folded all his fears up and put them away for the night, with his eyes open. All men are dogs, looking only to be told that they're okay, and won't be punished for getting horny -- that pleasure isn't the sin they've been told it always was, that they're allowed to desire. Without masks. She drops onto his couch, looking up at him from between her legs. He stays safe in the kitchen.

"Whatever. I mean, I am not looking for a boyfriend. Especially one who could fire me. This would strictly be a one-time deal. We never even have to mention it again..." He says no again, and she's sad for a split second: "Suit yourself." But the seed is planted. He's just a man. The camera pushes up against him, as he watches her face at rest, apparently disinterested; it nuzzles him like a familiar pet. "...You think you'd be able to forget about it? And not let it affect our working relationship?" She stares at the ceiling: "I've had to do much harder things than that in my life. Believe me." Because if it got weird, he explains, he'd have to fire her. She looks at him, point-blank: "Big deal. Didn't even wanna hire me in the first place." She doesn't drop his gaze until he says yes.

-- Page 11 --

He puts down his drink; she downs hers as he approaches. She puts her legs up in the air, to make a place for him to lie, and he does. "You feel nice," he muses, and she says she knows that. He kisses her, and they make love. It's quiet, and hungry.

It's loud, and raucous. Needless to say, Jason's having some more crazy sex. He keeps the gloves on; it's a little bit of a mask. He licks her foot while he's fucking her, and suddenly he's fucking Liam. He doesn't even know his name. He stops, freaked out, and Liam asks what's wrong, in Dawn's voice. Not even the gloves can save him from the truth: she's a dirty girl, she's touched the darkness. She's the truth about him, wearing a Dawn mask. He whines, and drops beside her, shaking with a secret. "I hate that you've been with vampires," he says, and she's offended: how is that his business? How is that his problem? There's a list of reasons: "They're fucked up. They're freaks. They're fucking dead."

He asks her what's wrong with her, letting something nasty like that even touch her; it's not rhetorical. He wants to know what's wrong with a person who would let something nasty like that touch them, let it creep inside them. How can we be normal, boy and girl, with things like this inside us? [Charlotte, Light & Dark](#): if Tara is everything I loved about Brenda, Jason is everything I couldn't handle. Easier to take because I neither respect nor find him all that appealing on a level beyond the aesthetic?

"For your information, that was the best sex I ever had in my life." (Problem number one: sex is all Jason has, and being good in bed is all he is.) "And who are you to judge?" (Problem number two: he's not.) "You fuck anything with a space between its legs." (Problem number three: exactly. He's the one on top, he kills sex with every kiss. This isn't about getting inside anybody, this is about what got inside him. I don't want to know who did this to him, the first attack, because it makes me sad to think about. Plus, if he's a survivor that makes the hot naked sex a lot less hot, which would be a shame.) He cries out, working backwards: "Best sex you ever had? You told me I was the best sex you ever had!" Right before he stopped calling, she notes, and coming to see her at work. She thought it was just

burnout, when he got weird and closed-off, but that wasn't it: she'd just given him what he wanted all along. A place to be.

-- Page 12 --

"And then I met that vampire..." Jason asks if it was Liam -- "Bald-headed, tattoos, crazy?" -- and she laughs. "No! Actually, he had a lot of hair. I met him in Shreveport at the vampire bar." And then she let him bite her? Let him inside? "Yeah, and I'm not... I'm not ashamed of that." Touching something new and dark, exploring ways of intimacy; she reassures herself and then tells him to get off the high horse. "Is that who you thought I was tonight? When you started rubbing up against me like a cat in heat?" She swears she knew it was him, touching his stomach and his cock, soothing him, but he's not having it. He gets weird. "You're a lying sack of shit! You would fuck that vampire, and let him bite you, if he showed up tonight." Jason's imaginary vampire, his nighttime double, that killed Maudette, that chased him into Dawn's arms, that's getting closer: What if it weren't a vampire at all?

"All right," Dawn says, finally offended, standing: "Now this is getting boring." She slips her panties on and asks him to leave, and he laughs. The prerogative of men, to go where they will, invited or not. She reminds him it's her house, and he keeps laughing. Boys. She takes it to the next Defcon: "God, just because you lost your hard-on doesn't mean you have to have a fucking meltdown. Believe it or not, the world does not revolve around your dick." He's offended, and she stalks off; when he whines at her she screams hilariously that she's going TO GET A CIGARETTE! He considers the condom on himself sadly, and takes it off, defeated.

"It isn't like I don't know that you're a great fuck," she says from the other room, over his protests. "It happens to every guy at some point or another," she says, returning with a gun pointed at his head: "...Except for vampires." He laughs at her, but she's not kidding around. It's the Jason Stackhouse filibuster: keep being adorable and doing what you want, and they'll give in every time. His response, awesomely, is to start flossing his teeth -- still in bed, still wearing the ridiculous gloves -- but she's not kidding around. "You do not own me, Jason Stackhouse. And if I want you out of my house, you better get your sorry ass out of here." He blows her off, flossing, and she shoots a bullet into the floor, startling him into the air.

"You are obnoxious and full of yourself and dumber than a box of hair," Dawn says seductively, crawling towards him on the bed, in her panties. "And now you can't even get it up? There's no reason why I should be seeing you anymore." Jason fumbles, trying to get his pants on. "You're fucking crazy!" She agrees, and tells him to leave again. "I don't think I feel like waiting," she says, as he stumbles away, his jeans half-on, and fires again. "Get the fuck out!" He's wearing unzipped jeans and elbow-length gloves. He should not be half as hot as he is right now.

-- Page 13 --

"That's right, you get the fuck out of my house!", she screams, chasing him toward the door. "Limp dick motherfucker! Go try your fucking grandmother with that limp dick!" Jason screams at the closed door, standing on the porch in his gloves: "Bitch! I can get it up! Bitch!" A sour-faced neighbor sticks her head out, probably just to get a closer look at how hot he is right now. "Yeah, you heard me. Your neighbor's a crazy bitch!" She's horrified and

retreats; I really hope Dawn doesn't get snuffed by the serial killer, or else the neighbor's going to talk, and I mean: you don't put a boy like this in GenPop. He gets in his truck, cursing bloodsuckers and punching the ceiling. They keep taking everything away.

It's a triptych: girls finally saying the things they're not supposed to say. First Tara and her Irish courage, then Dawn and her gun, and now? Spooky music floats us across the field, into the Compton house; the door floats open. Bill's reading a book in the parlor, lit by a million lanterns. It's not a scary place anymore. He zooms to a standing position, repeating her constant complaint: "Suckie, don't ever sneak up on a vampire. What are you doing here?" Sookie stands in her nightgown, never so tiny, and gives her riff on Tara's speech a moment ago. All the things she can't say, there's Tara to say them; in the nighttime world she can drop the filibuster and make her motion.

"All right, here's the deal, and this is a little embarrassing? I've never been with a man intimately, for all the reasons I told you about, but I feel things when I'm with you that make me think, and I know this could be a huge mistake, one I will regret forever, but it feels like you're the one that I'm supposed to, you know, do it with, and I'm really nervous about that, and frankly I'm scared to death of you, so can we just get it out of the way already so I can relax and get a good night's sleep?"

That is about the best speech I've ever heard. What if for just one day you could say what you're really thinking? What you really want? What if somebody gave you permission to be honest, even just for a second? For once, it's actually romantic. He smiles warmly, and leans in to kiss her, and she gives the other half of that speech, which is and always will be five words long: "Just don't bite me, okay?" And then she's spent, all talked out, everything on the table, guts and all. He kisses her, and they get hungrier -- it's a cross between both kinds of sex, the Tara and the Jason kind, the daytime and the nighttime kind. They help each other out of their clothes; she gasps as he takes her from behind.

-- Page 14 --

Sookie wakes slowly from the dream, touching herself. The hideous Tina cat stares at her, and Sookie stares her down: "Stop that." But the cat won't listen. It never does. Sookie grins at herself, and looks up toward the sky.

Sam growls and woofs in bed, waking Tara. She smiles, and reaches over, but he yips sharply to himself, and she draws back. She watches him for a while bemusedly: chasing rabbits, chasing cars.

Jason comes home and grabs a beer, breathing softly. He turns on the TV; it's an old movie, a vampire getting staked. (Points for the fact that it's a female vamp, on this particular night, for this particular character.) He clicks to the next, chuckling angrily, and there's Reverend Newlin's adult son, talking to a Jan Crouch analogue (and PS, old man: that reference is so dated almost half the posters in the forums had no idea what it was about) about his father's death: "...but the vampires assassinated my father, because of his campaign against the vampire agenda..." Paul's all, "Theodore Newlin is a hero! First casualty in World War III!" and Jan goes, "Amen!" and the kid goes, "It's Armageddon!" and Jan goes "Amen!" and Jason goes, "Amen!" and just as Newlin Jr.'s talking about whatever new witch hunt he's involved in, Jason changes the channel one more time. "Vampire bats are bats that feed on blood, feeding on the blood of animals like pigs and horses. The

vampire bat requires about two tablespoon..." The footage: graphic. Turning off the TV: immediate. Cursing softly and drinking: heavily.

The Nest. The camera glides into the parlor, over their three coffins: Liam's is a hard-rocking Scott Stapp-esque number with gothique scripte all over it reading, no lie, *Gott Ist Todd*. (What's sadder than your average queerbutt Ayn Rand dork? A vampire one, who's convinced he's *Evil Superman*.) Diane's is classic, with a monogram and Erzulie's crown, while Malcolm's is tiresomely clichéd. Isn't that nice? Not to mention the plastic covers on all the furniture.

But there's another riff here, relating to the God Hates Fangs metaphor, that you might not immediately connect to. These are people who have stepped out of the daylight. Into the strange places, where there aren't any rules, which is to say they are not governed by what governs us. They are rebels. But the thing about having no rules or loyalty to social roles is that you're without a major tool most people have for constructing identity. What we're looking at -- and it's no mistake that the rightmost one Kinseywise, Malcolm, is also the most committed to playing to stereotype -- is three people who, having left humanity behind, have no idea who they're supposed to be. So they gather together, with their shared desires, and stake out a place to be, supporting each other and egging each other on. And, inevitably, out come the glowsticks and Judy Garland references and no wire hangers and gogo boys in cutoff shorts and the whole damn mess. The comfort of moving from one cliché to another.

-- Page 15 --

Liam drinks blood from a big Kool-Aid-shaped pitcher; Janella hangs dead in a room off the front foyer, bleeding into a bucket to feed them. Diane drinks her blood from a martini glass and comforts Malcolm, who's feeling down. "Damn. I really liked Jerry." And it's true, he was very affectionate. "Don't worry. We'll find you another hot little blood bank," Diane says, and Liam offers a trip to LSU tomorrow night, to "raid us a frat house." Diane says "dumb, thick and juicy" is definitely on the menu, and I mean, let's keep Jason away from LSU for awhile, okay? There's a knock at the door, and Malcolm (as the senior vamp, I suppose) zooms to answer it. It's Bill; he comes into the parlor without noticing Janella.

"What luck, everyone's favorite buzzkill," groans Malcolm, but Diane and Liam greet him more warmly. Liam offers him blood; Diane offers him something else. She reaches out for his chest, remembering his "sizeable ... appetite," but he throws her across the room and through a wall. So I guess it's not a social call. The other two game up, and Diane stalks back towards him, pissed. "The three of you will stay away from me and Sookie from now on," Bill orders. Malcolm reminds him that he's Bill's elder, and that he has no authority in the nest. "There are higher authorities," he says portentously, and Malcolm says he's not afraid of Eric (!). "Higher than him," Bill says more delicately, and Malcolm says "she" can speak to him directly. (It's Aaliyah! I know it!) Diane gets in Bill's face: "She can suck on sunlight for all I care!" I love how Diane's got this whole level of hilarious vamp jargon that nobody else uses.

Bill reminds them all that they're not exactly advancing the cause, and Diane says the cause can additionally suck sunshine: "Not everyone wants to dress up and play human, Bill." Liam agrees: "Not everybody wants to live off that Japanese shit they call blood, either." And this part's interesting: "As if we could." Bill protests that they have to "moderate" their behavior, now that they're out in the open; he privately remembers to tell Sookie at

least fifty more closely held vampire secrets the next time he sees her, to help with this pursuit. Malcolm's ever so rational and sweet: "Not everybody thinks it was such a great idea. And not everybody intends to tow the party line. Honey? If we can't kill people, what's the point of being a vampire?"

Bill asks after Jerry, and Malcolm sadly admits that they left him on the side of I-20, minus "a souvenir or two" (about which he, happily, does not elaborate), and Janella got moved up the scale from a Sometimes to an Anytime Food. Bill checks her out, Diane laughing ridiculously the entire time: wrapped in plastic, come to a bad end. Bill says they make him sick, and Diane complains that he used to be fun. "This all on account of that little blond breather?" Kinda. "If you insist on flaunting your ways in front of mortals," Bill says one more time, "There will be consequences." He zooms away and Malcolm preens viciously at the closed door. "Asshole." I hear you, girl.

-- Page 16 --

Sam wakes up alone, with a slight headache; she's already gone, driving back home. When Tara opens the door, she's immediately clubbed over the head by a large, heavy book that's used as a weapon more often than it really should be. "Where the hell you been, you dirty whore? Out all night doing all kinds of God-know-what. You the devil, child. You ain't no child of mine..." I have to say that all anecdotal evidence would indicate that a waking Momma would be less pleasant than a passed-out Momma, and it's nice to see that confirmed.

Well, I guess not so much for Tara, who backs up in advance of Momma's next swing, causing Momma to bust ass on the floor. Tara's like, "Oh, Jesus," but Momma's fairly certain Jesus isn't interested in helping Tara at this time. "That's been clear for quite some time," Tara says ironically, towering over her mother's weakness. "You sass the Lord and I will kick your skinny ass, you hear me?" Tara reminds her that, currently, she's not even able to stand. Emboldened, brave, still high on honesty, she steels herself for bravery and says it: "...You pathetic, ugly old bitch." They are both shocked. Momma starts to cry, and Tara immediately drops to help her. "I ain't ugly," Momma whines, and I gotta say even Jesus would probably call bullshit.

"Momma, why do you wanna do this to yourself?" She clucks over her mother; she's just skin and bones and wild eyes. "If Jesus was here, he'd take one look at you and he'd apologize for giving me such a spiteful child." Tara notes that, given the stench of her, Jesus probably wouldn't make it through the door, and tries to help her up. "Now, let's just go and take a shower..." Momma spazzes out for awhile, and eventually her hands fall on an empty liquor bottle, heavy and glass, and bashes Tara across the head and into the wall. "Who's ugly now?" Jesus: "You. Times two. Keep it up, bitch."

Tara pulls it together, straightens her back, breathes deep. Says the things you just don't say. Steps outside the lines. "All right. You may have carried me and nursed me, but obviously you are now set on killing me." Given the choice between Momma and dying, Tara explains, Momma will always lose. She grits it out through tears, grabbing her keys. "You get back here! You help me up!" Nobody can. "You on your own, old woman." She leaves; it's the hardest thing she's ever done. Alone, Momma spazzes out some more. That was awful, and good. Both.

Sookie's forcing that lawnmower across the yard like she's fording a river, like she's pushing it through concrete walls. Adele calls to her from the porch -- "barely nine o'clock and already eighty degrees!" -- and gives her some fresh-squeezed lemonade. (Man, I wish my Grandmother had been like Sookie's. This whole scene would have played out like so: "I'm about to do crossword puzzles with my 9AM gimlet and I don't want any funny business, so shut that damned machine off. I have a hair appointment in an hour, you can sublimate your sexual frustration all over the lawn at that time. Now, about this vampire: is he educated? Breeding tells, Sookie.") Sookie admits that she's been landscaping since the sun came up, but she was awake well before then, masturbating herself into a coma.

-- Page 17 --

Gran catches her eye, and while sipping her lemonade Sookie makes this great, "Aw, hell" face. "Are you concerned about the vampire? Has he done something ... untoward?" Heh. Sookie says he hasn't but that the problem is not the vampire exactly, then gives another speech that's a tad less forthright. "What I'm thinking is, stay away, but what I'm feeling, what I'm feeling with my whole body is ... Something else entirely, and I don't know whether to trust my head, or..." Adele points at Jesus and reminds her that we are classy in the South: "Heart." They both smile with that Steel Magnolia smile that only comes out when there's naughtiness in the air, and Sookie agrees. "Well, that is a dilemma," Adele says, and tells her to come inside for breakfast. When Sookie says she's not hungry, Adele gives her The Look. "I didn't ask if you were hungry." Sookie's like, Um, okay then, and follows. That dang dog, who's been watching for who knows how long, stares for a second more before running off.

Lafayette answers the panicked beating on his door with the usual serene profanity; he is wearing amazing pajama pants covered in flames. "She hit me with a fucking liquor bottle," Tara says immediately. "My head is bleeding." He tells her to calm down and stop shouting, because he has a guest. Tara hesitates ("Oh shit") but he waves it off -- he's in the shower. Tara asks if it'll need stitches, and Lafayette takes a look: "You're gonna put some peroxide on that... Then take two Vicodin, with a big glass of red wine. Then smoke some badass ganja, baby. By the time you wake up... mm! All healed." (Well, if you wake up, with that awesomely ill-advised cocktail, but if you do, that would probably work all right.)

Tara continues to whine about her shitty, awful mother, as he fills her full of pills and alcohol and pot. I think we're so used to hearing the chords of doom whenever anybody drinks or takes any drugs that we're conditioned to think that they are literally the worst things in the world, and it's a nice piece of cognitive dissonance -- here and on the prior show -- when people use drugs and aren't immediately destroyed by the narrative gods. Hell, the first half of *American Beauty* was about the idea that Reefer Madness is usually preferable to Regular Flavor.

Tara asks if she can stay, and confirms that she doesn't really care to hear the answer. A man, white and stately and old, enters and is taken aback by the new person. "Hi!" says Lafayette, totally unselfconscious. "This is my cousin Tara!" He's about to introduce him to her, but the guy jumps in and supplies a fake name: "Duke. Duke Smith," which causes Lafayette to bust out. "Boyfriend, you are so not a duke." This does not put "Duke" at ease, and he stutters in Mad Libs: "I left the \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_?" Lafayette thanks him kindly for the money he left in the bedroom and offers "Duke" a toke off Tara's joint. "Thank you. Call me when the \_\_\_\_\_ comes in?" Of course. Lafayette, grandly says ta-ta, with one last hilarious "Take care, Duke."

And what the hell was that? "That was a state senator." Tara asks if he's tricking now, and Lafayette is like, hey reality: "I'm supposed to be satisfied being a fucking short-order cook and working on the road crew? Which is basically one step from the chain gang?" He smacks his body, making her laugh, and says it's his "ticket" -- "How else am I gonna get ahead in this podunk town? Already got a website," he says, sitting again. Tara muses. "What's wrong with us, Lafayette? You're a state-senator-fucking prostitute and I'm a bartender in a redneck bar, who fucks her boss who's in love with her best friend..." Lafayette offers her another hit, and then stops short. "...Wait a minute, you slept with Sam?" Tara nods. "Know what? He barks in his sleep." They agree that white folks are just all fucked up, and it's so self-evident that they barely even laugh.

The Sam dog runs up to ... Sam. Huh. He's reading the paper, and opening up in a way he said he never would: "What's up, my brother? ...Oh hell, Starbucks coming to Marthaville." He asks the dog how long until he breaks down and buys "a goddamn cappuccino machine," then admits that more than a Starbucks, what he wish would come to town is: Buffy. "Or Blade. Or any one of those badass vampire killers, to take care of Mr. Compton. That's what I wish." He laughs at the dog, who could give a fuck, and throws the ball for the dog; they chase it together.

"Marthaville's getting a Starbucks," Sookie notes, and Gran wonders why on earth anybody would pay three bucks for "a cup of coffee with too much milk." Sookie points out -- and this is so Alan Ball -- that, per Arlene, people are less calcium-deficient than they used to be, because of all the fancy coffee they drink nowadays. Gran laughs and feels a little more in love with the future. "I never thought of that, but it does make sense." She pours herself some coffee nonetheless.

"Hey, Gran. Do you think I should continue seeing Bill?" Adele tells her that of course she can't be the one to say. "I can tell you that I think he is a smart, handsome and very polite young man... But of course he's gonna show his best side to me, so that I won't stand in the way of his courting you." There's a wonderful note to Sookie's line here, which is equal parts admission and defiance: "He scares me." Out loud, to the only other person in all Bon Temps who's on Team Bill. "Well, it is scary opening your heart up to somebody," Gran says, and Sookie's like, "True. Plus HE IS A VAMPIRE."

"I suppose. Bill is the first vampire I ever met... that I know of." Sookie says she's not scared that he would ever hurt her; that Adele was right the first time: "Scared because... I don't know what he's thinking." Gran opines that this is a probable relief, given Sookie's circumstances, and stumbles over the elephant in the room, wondering if she's crossed the line. Sookie stands, and takes her stuff to the sink. Why talk about it? "You know," Adele says more loudly, to Sookie's embarrassed back: "Your grandfather used to know things." Sookie's back goes straight, but she doesn't turn: "What things?"

"If somebody was having money problems, running around behind their wife's back. Sick. That kind of thing. Personal things they never would have told anybody about." All shame forgotten, Sookie whips around all OMG, right? "See, that's exactly it. If I don't stop myself from it, I hear everybody's deepest, darkest secrets. I'm sorry! That's just too much information!"

But there's a daylight side to it, just like people. "But then Earl's brother, your great-uncle Francis, came back from Korea in real bad shape. All torn up, from the things he'd seen. Earl knew he was thinking about killing himself. He went over there in the middle of the night one night, Francis was just about to kick the chair out from underneath him. Already had the noose around his neck. But Earl talked him out of it." Sookie looks at her grandmother, who's reaching the point.

"I just think there is a purpose for everything that God creates. Whether it's a unique ability, or a cup of overpriced coffee with too much milk. Or a vampire." Sookie smiles. "God will reveal that purpose when the time is right."

Sookie nods and kisses her cheek; on the stairs, she turns back. "Wait. I thought great-uncle Francis did kill himself. With a shotgun." Gran nods: "Oh yes, he did. But that was years later."

Sookie rolls her eyes, Adele is hilarious and awesome, stares into space, finishes her coffee.

Somebody else is beating down Lafayette's door, later. His shouting curses stop short when he opens the door; he curls himself toward Jason, like a sex kitten in gold lamé. Jason's unfazed, because what: somebody wants to fuck Jason Stackhouse? What else is new. "Lafayette, I need your help!" Lafayette leans against the doorframe: "I am so glad you finally recognized that truth." He's a guide. And Jason? Giggles. "You're wearing gold pants!" Giggles again. I mean, you could die from such a man. They sit on the couch -- the pants are fairly awesome, now that you mention it -- and Jason whispers the word "Viagra" so softly only Sam could hear him. "What?" says Lafayette, loving it. "Viagra. Do you have any Viagra?" Lafayette laughs at him, because -- "Puppy dog" -- Viagra is legal. "You can buy it in the drugstore!" Right, but Jason needs it STAT. "Don't you have anything that would..." Lafayette supplies a troubling metaphor: "Give you wood so hard a saw couldn't cut through it?" Even Jason is kind of amazed by the imagery: "Yeah, that sounds good. I think..." Lafayette admits he's holding something, but it's pricey: "Six hundred a quarter of an ounce." Oh, hell.

-- Page 20 --

"Get the fuck out of here. What in the hell's worth that kind of money?" Guess. Put one toe over the line, might as well just strip down and jump in. Jason's stepping out of the daylight, into the strange places. Where there aren't any rules, and the thing about having no rules or loyalty to social roles is that you're without a major tool most people have for constructing identity. (In Jason's case, literally; his identity comes down to just one tool.) But he's dealing with the Shadow. The only way out is through. Without Lafayette as his guide -- and I mean that in the capital-G, Joseph Campbell way, considering he's been marked as such from his first appearance more strongly than any other archetypal character on this show -- we know how this story ends: with Jason dead. Testing the limits again and again until he fucks up, out of stupidity or self-hatred. I'm not saying this won't go to hell faster than anything you ever saw, but: it's not a drug, it's an inoculation. A little bit of darkness at a time, until you're not allergic anymore. Until you can look at the darkness in yourself. The only way out is through.

"When'd you start dealing v?" When there was a market for it, and don't tell anybody. Lafayette pulls his hair: "Do you understand me? The vamps don't take kindly to the juice dispenser." Jason agrees easily, and asks about the source. "Let's just say I have an

arrangement with a certain life-challenged individual who appreciates my multi-faceted talents." Jason's nervous, for the first time in this house. "Goddamn. Is there anybody who isn't fucking vampires these days?" (Is there nobody who wants to fuck me that isn't fucking vampires these days?) "Tell me something, lover. Do you wanna get it up and keep it up and have the best sex you have ever had? For both you and your lady friend?" Jason is adorable: "Yes yes yes yes yesyesyes." He tells Jason one or two drops, no more. (And don't feed it after midnight.) "Any more and things might get a little intense. I don't mean in a good way." Their eyes lock and Jason smiles dumbly, punching him lightly on the shoulder. "Thanks, man. Appreciate it."

Lafayette jerks him back down onto the couch: "Ain't nothin' free in my world." Jason starts to filibuster, batting his eyes and asking if he can come back later. "Motherfucker, who you think I am?" He locks the door and looks down at Jason from a thousand feet up. "I don't run a layaway program. And I ain't interested in instituting one." As though Jason will ever understand paying his debts, until it's too late. "Isn't there *some* way you can let me pay you this afternoon?" Lafayette thinks. And man, if you were Sookie you'd be real uncomfortable for a second.

-- Page 21 --

Jason stands in the bedroom in his undies, very wriggly. "Goddamnit, I hate video cameras." Especially when they catch you strangling the town whore while you come. "You know how much you could make if you had your own website? Queens all over this world would pay good money just to watch you jack off..." Jason balks, protesting that all he was supposed to do was dance. "Okay. Dance." Lafayette turns on some hilariously on point Jonny McGovern, and Jason snaps his fingers awkwardly. "Is anybody gonna see this who knows me?" Lafayette sways his hips to the music and levels: "Probably. There's a lot of perverts in this town." Heh. Hey, just say your name's Duke. It's the daylight way. "No way. That's not cool, man," he says, grabbing his jeans for the second time today. "Look. You want the V or not?"

"...Gimme the fucking mask," Jason says. And just like that, his face is erased again, replaced by ... Laura Bush. Wow. "That's my Jason," Lafayette says: just two men, one faceless, a camera and a mask. And then somebody else: Tara, staring through the beads with her eyes grown wide: "What... The... Fuck..." Jason starts dancing, awkward at first, but soon enough the mask takes hold, and he can be whoever he wants. "I like what you're working with," Lafayette says, and Jason goes for it. It's ... awesome, let's say. "Ooh, shake that ass! Lover, you gonna make me clutch my pearls!" Oh, Lafayette. Jason giggles inside the mask, and smacks his ass.

Everybody is, you know, somebody. We're all just trying to be seen. To matter. But when the truth is something you don't want anybody seeing, you're in a pickle. Because everybody is also trying not to be seen -- to matter, without risk. You've got the camera, but you also need the mask. Everybody's body is their ticket, when we're food; whether it's for vamps or for the hungry eyes on the other side of the camera, just remember that you're food now. And everybody's shopping. Beyond the beaded veil, Tara makes a face that cannot easily be put into words, but goes something like: "Well. Well well well."

Sookie loiters on Bill's porch, staring in the window and then panning around the room, all the way around to where the camera started; that cello starts as she remembers her dream. He's still sleeping; it's the daytime. She steps back and puts her purse down, sits on the

porch, looks up at the sun. Things get all trippy and wild in the field, v-juice still coursing through her veins and then she's, um, going to masturbate suddenly. Sookie! That's just not polite! That's a private activity!

-- Page 22 --

("Okay Anna, you've just reached your boyfriend's house and realized that he lives in a coffin and isn't available, so you sit down and jerk off until he wakes up. Take one.") The phone rings, and it's Sam. Perfect! But no, she puts herself away and tells him she's on her day off. "No, I'm not asking you to come in, I need you to run by Dawn's and wake her up. She probably just overslept." Sookie sighs and heads over there. "Dawn? It's me, Sookie. Honey, you overslept..." No answer, so she opens the screen and knocks on the door. Nothing. She opens it wide, and stands in the threshold. "Dawn?" The screen door slams behind her; she enters, as is her prerogative. "Are you here?"

Dawn's got one of those alarm clocks that you can only hear when you're in the room with it and nowhere else in the house, including just on the other side of the open door; I have noticed that the people who own those peculiar alarm clocks are often found lying around totally murdered. Like Dawn. Dammit! Dawn is awesome! "Dawn? Dawn?" Neat acting moment: Sookie looks blankly at the body for awhile before the horror travels all the way up her spine... and then jumps about ten feet into the air, screaming her ass off.

And *that* is why you shouldn't masturbate.

## SEX ON FIRE

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 4 | Aired on 09.28.2008

*Escape From Dragon House* - Jason brings new meaning to the term southern rock and we finally get background on Tara's devotion to him; things heat up for Bill and Sookie after a danger- (and Muppet-) tinged visit to Eric's vampire sex club.

Okay, so the cops naturally assume Jason killed Dawn, and take him in. Of course, it's only after he's handcuffed in the back of Andy's car that he realizes he has an entire vial of V in his pocket, so he panics, drinks the whole thing, and leaves the empty vial stuffed between the car cushions. Meanwhile, Bon Temps takes the second murder this week as a reason to throw a barbecue, which is so realistic it's sick. While in custody, Jason's dick goes crazy and he locks himself in the bathroom to have ten thousand life-threateningly intense orgasms. Eventually Tara arrives, terrorizes Bud and Andy with jurisprudence knowledge you could glean from any random episode of [Law & Order](#), and lies that she was with Jason -- not Sam -- last night.

Hours later, Jason's managed to rub his hands blistered; his dick is now approaching the appearance of, we're told, an eggplant; and we've taken a grand step forward in the sexual dissociation that would seem to be Jason's entire life. (At one point he actually weeps and apologizes to it like Gollum, calling it "Darlin." This is what I'm saying.) Tara finds him in the cooler at Merlotte's applying steaks to himself and takes him to the ER, where horrible things happen that we don't need to talk about. Tara remembers the day she fell for Jason: they were both in their tweens, and he saved her from Momma in an adorable fashion. Oh, and I think I know who the killer is.

Realizing things in Bon Temps are reaching a fever pitch, w/r/t serial killings, witch hunts, and general neurosis and racism, Gran realizes it's only a matter of time before the pitchfork swings back around at Jason, and tells Sookie to use her psychic abilities to get him off the hook. Learning that both Maudette and Dawn frequented the vampire bar in Shreveport, she asks Bill to accompany her there, specifying that it is not a date. Bill spends (almost) the entire episode being completely and utterly adorable. At the wildly dorky but self-aware Fangtasia, which is identical to a cheesy gothy tourist bar in the French Quarter but with vampires in addition to the hordes of deeply lame sexually confused and ambiguous, Sookie makes the acquaintance of Eric and Pam. Pam is like Kylie + Botox - Feelings + Dominatrix Gear = Awesome, and Eric is ... well, he's like the [Serena](#) to Bill's Blair Waldorf: dreeeeeeamy, effortlessly magnetic, powerful, beloved, and hilariously fun-loving and, most importantly: in charge. A random police raid sends all four of them into the night, and then on the way back home Bill listens to shitty (and eponymous) Cambodian pop, then glamours the shit out of a good ole boy cop, freaking the shit out of Sookie all the way back to square one.

What else. Oh, the nine feet of cornfed sex that is Hoyt Fortenberry *finally* gets some dialogue, delivering it so sweetly that he earns a kiss from Sookie; we see a bit of Arlene's nastier side and her home life with the put-upon Rene; Tara is a badass the whole time as usual; and everybody involved in the crime scene is fucking creepier than a Wegman Weimaraner. The pitchfork of blame points at everybody, basically, but ends up pointing -- as insistently as Jason's giant cock -- at one Sam Merlotte, owner of gloves, possessor of total cuteness, yipper of sleep... And landlord/likely murderer of Dawn. In whose bed we end

the episode with Sam, as he goes from sniffing the sheets like a lissome but unsettling perv ... to rolling around in them like a werecollie in shit.

To reiterate: White people? *All* kinds of fucked up.

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Sookie's still screaming, the alarm in Dawn's apartment is still going off. She calls for help, but there's no help coming. She approaches, slowly, and looks down at Dawn. "Sweetie, what did you get yourself into?" The question of the day. They'll keep asking, and every time they ask they'll really be asking Sookie, "What are you getting yourself into?" Nobody louder than Sookie herself. She pulls the sheet over Dawn's throat, on the bite marks there. Marked, as in branded; marked, as in special. Like a freckle or a mole.

Jason enters behind her, dropping a vase full of flowers in shock. Sookie runs to her brother, into his arms, sobbing. "It's okay," he says, staring at Dawn's face; Sookie slaps him across the chest: "Like hell it is! Look at her. She is definitely not okay." Jason points out that abusing him isn't going to help either, and Miss Lefebvre, the creepy neighbor, answers Sookie's scream. She gasps, and walks across broken glass. Jason holds a bouquet of flowers: the lost language, to say that he's sorry for scaring her, for pointing the finger, for seeing his own darkness and his curiosity in her. For his jealousy.

Miss Lefebvre immediately asks what Jason did, how it happened, and Sookie shakes her head, saying he just got there, but Miss Lefebvre knows better. "I saw you last night. I heard you all fighting, then she took a shot at you, and you ran off. And now she's dead?" Sookie's stunned. Jason admits that they fought, but he came back to apologize for pushing her to it. Sookie's confused -- she takes a shot at you and you're the one apologizing? -- but the explanation is too confusing, too open, too honest. He can't speak a word. He came with flowers and a vial of V: she was angry, wasn't she, because he couldn't get it up? That was his apology: flowers and the only thing he's got.

Miss Lefebvre runs off to call the cops, and Jason throws the flowers, pissed. "Then call 'em! I had nothing to do with this." It follows him like a scent, it marks him. Sookie stares after him; he sits on Dawn's porch silently, staring at the world.

Bon Temps gathers outside Dawn's home, staring at the closed door, from a safe distance, fascinated and terrified. Hoyt Fortenberry can't understand how something so beautiful could die like that, in the night, with the world all around. Arlene offers the suggestion that perhaps it was Dawn's time to go, but Rene knows better. "Ahh, she was only 23 years old. Ain't no 23-year-old in the world whose time has come." Hoyt's mother Maxine comes running up with a fan and a golf visor, playing Southern Lady. Like a vampire's black coffin, like a fangbanger's collar. Hoyt tells her Dawn's dead, but that's not what she wanted to know. There's nothing sensational about what already happened, when something's happening right now.

-- Page 2 --

"Who they got in there?" Arlene explains about how Sookie found the body, but they're saying Jason was the one that done her in. Hoyt knows better, but nobody knows who did: "Probably the same person that killed Maudette." Rene points out that Bon Temps is too small for girls to be dropping dead like this, and hopes aloud that they "fry the fuck." Arlene

gasps and he apologizes to Maxine, who responds in the scariest possible way: "No need to apologize. We're all excited." Rene shrugs, because that's not really the word. "To be a fly on the wall in that apartment right now," Maxine breathes, shaking with joy.

A fly settles on Dawn's lips; Jason is slumped on the couch in the background as Sheriff Bud tries to walk Sookie through it: was the door open or closed? Open. He writes down that the killer, then, must have had the keys.

*(Pisses me off, the way she calls me "Andy." Everyone calls Bud "Sheriff," why can't they call me "detective," goddamn it? When am I gonna get some respect around here?)*

Mike the coroner covers the body, smiling down creepily. *(Would you look at that? A fine pair of perfect, natural breasts. I'd have laid down money that they were fake. Well done, God... And then, not so well done, letting her die like you did.)*

It's Jason who's thinking the loudest. *(Shit. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck am I gonna do? I already got out of this once, no way they're gonna let me walk again. And I'm too damned pretty to go to prison...)*

Bud calls Sookie back to herself, and she shuts it down. What was the question? "Is that the exact position you found her in?" Sookie admits that she pulled the sheet up a bit, although she didn't touch the body, and a little of that Sookie fire comes back when Bud complains about that. "Next time I find a friend dead, I'll try to remember that."

Arlene stands outside the home of a dead woman, a broken dead woman, and complains about the summer heat. Maxine nods, fanning herself, grotesque. "I feel like a cat on a hot tin roof! That's from a play." Hoyt laughs quietly at his mother; Rene heads inside for a beer. Arlene tells him to bring also a bucket of ice, those "nice" plastic cups they got last week, and some doilies. Rene points out that the doily obsession is getting out of control: "Doilies are to protect the table. We outside." Arlene's voice gets hard as she suggests people might want to rest their cups on the car or something, and tells him to shut up and do it. "If all our conversations end with them saying 'Fine', why do they bother putting up a fight?" Maxine laughs. When you're powerless this is what power looks like.

-- Page 3 --

Inside, Miss Lefebvre can't bring herself to say the words Jason used in his fight last night with Dawn. Andy Bellefleur writes it down (BITCH -> GUNSHOT) and lets her go; she kindly calls him "Andy" as she goes, and he winces angrily. When you feel powerless, sometimes you need to express your power in other ways. If people don't recognize you as a detective, if they don't give you the respect you deserve, you have the option of taking it out one someone smaller, or weaker, or younger. When you're a policeman, for example, that includes everybody.

Well, almost everybody. We'll get there. But for the most part the police, the senator, the detective, the sheriff: they're the kings of this world. Ignore that at your peril, because they're the ones with the guns. And if they feel like, say, putting some cuffs on Jason Stackhouse and smashing his head against their car, then throwing him in the back seat onto his face, and slamming the door shut on him on a hot summer day... He puts on his shades; he can't even hear you know, asking for air conditioning. It's petulant and it's petty, but it's also a reestablishment of the rules of the world as he understands them. All you had

to do was call him "Detective," but there's no way anybody could know that. Andy Bellefleur is a quiet, angry mystery. And he has all the power.

Jason leans back, uttering profanities in his irritation, but they immediately turn back to fear: the vial of V in his pocket. "Oh, fuck." He pulls out the vial and stares at it, looks around for a moment, and down the whole thing. Oh man. He makes a nasty face, and shoves the vial deep between the car seats as Andy gets in and tells him to shut up before he can even rev up his whining. Sam drives up in his truck as they're leaving; Maxine smears Hoyt with sunblock ("Your skin's whiter than Desitin!") and he threatens to move out. She doesn't seem worried. At this point it seems clear that Hoyt is either going to die or go even crazier than Jason.

"Came as soon as I heard," Sam says, sitting next to Sookie on the porch. "I'm sorry you had to be the one to find her." Sookie allows as how somebody had to be the one. "I tell you, Sook, sometimes I don't even recognize this world we're living in. I mean, Goddamn it..." Sookie tells him to hush: "God didn't do this." He smiles and asks if he should shut down the bar, but she's not feeling it: why deny people a stiff drink on a day they need it? Besides, she says, she'd welcome the chance to work: "The last thing I need right now is time alone with my thoughts." Of course, he gives in, and she says she just has to stop home and tell Adele what happened. Not Dawn -- which everybody knows by now -- but Jason going back to jail for another dead girl. Another uniform arrives and asks Sam to let them into Dawn's storage unit. Apparently he's her landlord, and has a key.

-- Page 4 --

Sam produces the key and kisses Sookie on the forehead; a boy's tentative voice asks her to let him by. It's Coroner Mike's new apprentice, Neil Jones from Kentucky. You never really see his face. He says hello, quietly, and Sookie watches Mike joke around as they load the body into their van. "Lift, kid. Come on, lift. You don't have to be too careful. Ain't gonna hurt her!" It's sad, but also scary; it's also very real. Death is one of those things big enough that you never really look at it. You talk around it; in its presence you feel ridiculous and numb and like a rubbernecker. But then at the same time the fear and horror express themselves in such strange ways: witch hunts to save the already dead. Seeing death in the face of a man just because he's dead. Looking for anybody to blame when death comes calling. The more inevitable something is, the more emotional we get.

Jason eats a little snack in the office with Bud and Andy, as Andy goes back over the story again. Jason says he's not going to change his story, and Andy half-heartedly tries to trick him into believing that his story's already changed. Jason gets a very stupid look on his face, because Jason is kind of stupid. "You're trying to trick me! It don't count if I get tricked. Does it?" Andy asks if it gets him off, killing girls and "sticking it" to them. Jason is not into that, exactly. "See, I think it does. I think it turns you on." Jason notes that actually it sounds like Andy's the one that's turned on by it, and Bud laughs. Andy shoots him a look and keeps going with this pointless interrogation.

"Tell me, is that how you do it? Kill 'em then fuck 'em? Or do you fuck 'em and then kill 'em? Or I know," he says, standing self-righteously, "You strangle 'em as you're fucking 'em!" Jason's erection chooses just this inopportune moment to answer the call. "Don't you, you sick fuck? How many other women you done this to besides Dawn and Maudette?" Jason covers his penis and makes a crazy face, begging to use the bathroom. He jumps up and runs, and eager to continue pushing at him, Andy tries to follow, but Bud Dearborn pulls

him back. How long before you'd say something? Who watches the watchers? Who tells the kings of this world when they've gone too far?

Jason hobbles through the offices toward the bathroom, leans on the sink, stares down at his giant boner. The release of the pressure as he unzips his jeans is almost too much. Back in the office, Andy complains that Bud laughed at him; Bud says it's only funny because this is pointless. Jason stares down, and touches it, breathing hard. I mean to say that something dead has come to life again, blood pulsing through it, and it's hungry, and it doesn't care who it destroys to feed its hunger. Hot as a fever, hot as rain. It's hunger that sees no difference between pleasure and pain, not because they are connected but because they are both irrelevant: The thing Jason's always been afraid is coming true. *In his pants.*

-- Page 5 --

"Bud, we got two dead girls and this dumbfuck admits to sleeping with both of 'em within hours before they were killed." But on the other hand, Bud points out, they also had vampire bites on them, and Jason's not a vampire. Not exactly. Jason comes for the first time and drops to the floor, screaming. He writhes, moaning, as Bud and Andy hotfoot it toward the bathroom door. Andy tries, and starts knocking and yelling; Jason tries desperately to clean himself off, moaning quietly to himself and trying to stall.

Tara parks right outside the police station, and comes looking for Jason immediately. "You charging him with anything? I assume he's been properly Mirandized?" Blank stares. "Tell me you informed him he has a right to have an attorney present." Andy giggles to himself that this is no longer a concern, now that she's arrived; Tara stares him down. "Is that funny because I'm a woman? Or because I'm a black woman?" Andy says it's funny for neither reason, but because she talks like a lawyer from television. "How do you know all this anyway?" asks Bud. "You been taking night classes?" Tara blows them off, and is awesome: "School is just for white people looking for other white people to read to them. I figured I'd save my money and read to myself."

Jason hobbles out and stares at Tara, who promises to get him out of there. Andy protests and tries to get strong, but Tara knows he's got nothing, and Bud agrees: without a charge they can't hold him. "He can't say where he was last night! At least he coulda done make some shit up!" Andy Bellefleur is gross. This isn't a game and it has nothing to do with your cock. Girls are dying and you're too full of random old-man sex jealousy creepiness and obsession to care. Jason whines that he was sleeping alone last night, which is true, and Andy screams, "You never sleep alone, Stackhouse, and you know it!" Um, that is all in your gross mind. Congratulations on being the only person on earth to think about Jason's cock more than Jason (and possibly Tara). Old straight white dudes are the worst! Your creepy old man dick is not important to anybody! It is not magical! It does not want to fight with anybody else's dick! You and your dick are obsolete! Concentrate on your own irrelevance and insecurity, and stay out of my pants!

God, nothing creeps me out more than that, when the whole virility envy/fear comes up in their wrinkly old eyes and they get those thin lips and start making judgments. Nothing. It's like looking at somebody with their skin inside-out so you can see their insides on the outside, crying for their stupid mama. Where does it come from, this magical thing with the dick where it's like a whole other person they simultaneously hate and fear and also it's all they can think about? And they expect you to ... play along with this weird dissociative behavior, and before you know it you're saying the stupidest things and trying to play along

without laughing in their big dumb intensely-into-it faces. Where does that come from? It's like the cum on the face thing, it's so mysterious. I think Jason has something to teach us about all of this.

-- Page 6 --

Tara, having seen this whole obsessive showdown a bajillion times because we all have, takes a quick left turn: "Guys, he was with me." Andy points out that Jason seems to have no recollection of said night of passion, and she explains that it was a secret. "People think just because we got vampires out in the open now, race isn't a issue no more. But you ever see the way folks look at mixed couples in this town? Race may not be the hot-button issue it once was, but it's still a button you can push on people." (And Dawn deserved what she got.) Tara tells them to get a Bible and she'll swear on it, then drags him out of there. "Jason and I were together last night, and it was a beautiful thing." Jason smiles and nods, still completely compromised by the problem in his pants. Bud lets them go, against Andy's wishes, and the last thing they see as he leaves the frame is him throwing a peace sign.

Sookie gets the usual speech from Gran about how Jason, while a terrible fool in many ways, would never murder multiple girls. However, what with the sudden uptick in murders, it's going to swing back around, and they'll come looking for him. So even though he didn't do it, Sookie needs to do whatever she can to clear his name. Not wanting to talk about her mark, Sookie asks how, and Adele sighs. "You use the gift God gave you. Listen in on people, keep your ears open. You're bound to hear something." Sookie begrudgingly remarks that it's nothing to do with her ears, and Gran gives her the big eye. "Whatever it is you use to listen, use it. He is your brother, Sookie." Sookie assents and Gran hugs her firmly, looking her in the eye to make sure she'll do it. "Good girl."

At Merlotte's, they're thinking up a storm. Mustache: (*Whoever killed Dawn, I wonder if he had sex with her or not. Seems like a waste if he didn't. She sure was pretty. Never even looked at me...*) She's listening, for once. All they think about is sex, sex, sex.

Old horny lady: (*Can't get that letter in Cosmo out of my head. How much better could an orgasm with a vampire be? I wonder, is it that much better?*)

Youthful redneck: (*What the hell is this world coming to? Dead fucks, niggers and regular folk all livin' together. If God wanted it like this, he'd have made us look the same. It ain't good. Maybe these really are the end times...*)

Old bitch: (*Dunno what everybody's upset about, these whores had it coming. Hanging out in vampire bars... That ain't natural, and it ain't safe.*)

-- Page 7 --

An unhappy woman stares at Sookie: (*You seem sad that girl is dead. I wonder if y'all were friends. And if you were, that means you're probably next. Fucking fangbangers. Crazy, every last one of you. Just like those women who write love letters to serial killers...*) Sookie can't handle it, the heat behind it, and takes off, leaving the woman asking aloud for her ranch dressing. Ugh. Ranch dressing is like a disease, or heterosexuality. I won't have it in the house, and I don't understand how people even thought of it.

Arlene orders two margaritas and bitches about how Dawn left them high and dry. Sookie is, of course, appalled, and points out that Dawn wasn't exactly working according to a plan when she got her ass murdered. "I know, but if she didn't spend her nights off at that vamp bar in Shreveport, she still would be." Sookie stares her down and tells her to be ashamed of herself. Arlene asks if there's not even a tiny part of Sookie that knows she was asking for it; Sookie steals her ranch dressing for the awful woman and takes off.

Tara rushes in, having taken Jason home, and her gigantic arm muscles bulge as she very deliberately ties her apron without looking at poor Sam. He says they should probably talk, about how they randomly had sex, but she tells him in no uncertain terms to forget it, and not because she's gaming him: "I'm gonna make it very, very easy. Nothing happened between us last night. And if anybody asks, you didn't see me at all, okay? I'm telling people I spent the night with Jason." Sam's shocked, and Tara tells him to keep quiet. Even Tara is kind of amazed by this latest weirdo thing she's done, but she won't take any guff from Sam about it: "There's more to Jason than meets the eye," she says, this close to hysteria. "Deep down he is a very good person!"

Jason does some very good masturbating and drinks a very good beer at home. Unsurprisingly, it's a threesome porno: two guys, one of them bald. Crazy-eyed. Jason groans and comes. There's nothing lovely about it, nothing fun: just compulsion. Sexual addiction is hilarious until you realize there's not really any sex in it. I don't think Jason's ever had sex in his life, not really. Just watched Jason fucking. His dick forgets ejaculating, and he almost cries, shouting desperately, "Go fucking down!" He wipes off, and starts up again. He's actually reached the end of the porno, a place no man has ever seen. His eyes roll back as the tape ends and the TV cuts to the news: "In Iraq today, ten US Marines were killed..." There's a huge blister on his thumb. There's no sex here, at the end of sex. "Ah, motherfucker..." He stares down at it, and begins to cry. "Oh, baby. My sweet, sweet baby."

-- Page 8 --

One of the guys thinks fondly about how Dawn's ass used to hang out of her shorts. (Make you wanna slap it! Peaches and cream! A whole world of sex, all around: sex, sex, sex. There's not a lot of sex in it, once you take away all the parts of sex that we use to hurt other people.) His wife stares at Sookie and hopes her brother gets the chair.

Hoyt Fortenberry stares into his beer. (*Crying shame is what it is. This place ain't gonna be the same without Dawn. She had the prettiest, nicest smile. Why was I so scared to talk to her? I'll never know what her voice sounded like. I bet it sounded like angels and parakeets. Mixed together.*) Sookie stares at him, at the adorable nine feet of him, and says his name without thinking. He looks up shyly, and she thanks him with a kiss on the cheek. He's confused, but pleased. He deserves more of that.

Sookie sees her brother enter, and asks him straight out if he killed her. He's got a whole logic proof that is hilarious; it would be funnier if he weren't in such secret pain. "Jesus, Sook. Look: When Maudette died, I thought I might've done it. And it turned out I didn't. With Dawn, I don't even *think* I might've done it, so I know I *didn't*." If that makes sense, am I becoming dumb like Jason? She asks him to swear, and he starts getting offended. Sookie chills. "Sorry. Gran asked me to listen in on folks, see if I can't clear your name. And sometimes it's hard..." He knows they're about to have a talk, she's "revving up for a long one," and instead of listening to the burdens of the town retard psychic, he says they'll talk soon: he needs Lafayette.

"What the fuck, Lafayette?" The wizard chops easily, quietly, not liking his tone. "My problem is my dick. It's been hard since three o'clock! Something went wrong with that vamp blood you..." Lafayette cuts him dead. "-- Will you shut the fuck up? With your loud ass. And ain't nothing wrong with the shit I sold you." Jason is starting to wonder what it is, what magic has animated what was dead and brought it to such angry, hungry life. Lafayette gives him a sidelong grin; there is no desire in it. "How much you take?" Jason tells him, and Lafayette laughs, a rumbling angry laugh. "You a dizzy motherfucker. I said one drop, two max, and you took the whole thing?" Jason explains about panicking in the cop car, and asks for something to make it go away, but Sarah Palin's all the way in Alaska, making sure the Russians aren't up to anything.

-- Page 9 --

"Ain't no antidote to V, boyfriend." He laughs, ignoring Jason as he takes one painful step at a time, resting his weight on the counters of the kitchen. "When my grandpa was alive, he had gout." Lafayette can tell he's revving up for a long one, and finally looks up at him. "...And he said just the weight of a sheet on his big toe was too much to bear. So help me God, that's exactly what this feels like." Lafayette counsels him to rub one out, thinks about getting the video camera, but Jason's rubbed out infinity. "Were you listening to me? *I got gout! OF THE DICK!*"

Tara turns and watches, as Bill enters Merlotte's. A hush falls over the crowd. Arlene darts an eye at busy Sookie and takes his table; he asks for O Negative and without even pausing she tells him all they have in is A Negative. Sookie hears his voice, and stares over. Arlene takes off with the order just as Bill's trying to ask her what's going on in the bar. Why all the people of Bon Temps need a good stiff drink tonight. At the bar, Tara tells her they have plenty of O and A Neg both, and Arlene makes it clear he can go fuck himself. "And don't microwave it either. He can have it cold." Tara throws her hands up and says Arlene is bad, but really what Arlene is, is gross. The advantages we take, when we can, to be nasty. For the purposes of this transaction, waitress and customer, she's the king of this world. She can do whatever she wants. Won't bring Dawn back -- not that she cares -- and it won't make her feel better. Sookie, knowing she's just being a bitch, already knows that Bill prefers O Negative, and offers to take it out to him. "Good. He gives me the creeps," Arlene says. Which is pettiness that adds up to hate. It's not the raving lunatics that make a nation racist, it's the tiny little pieces of us all.

Sookie places the bottle on his table and takes his hand, leading him outside without even looking at his face. It's a cool moment. This is her world; she knows he's not sure of the rules. "You know my friend who works here? Dawn? Someone killed her last night." Bill's question, outside, is the wrong one: "How?" The rules are, if somebody's friend died, you say you're sorry. She explains this to him without a whole lot of attitude, and waits for him to say it. "You don't even have to mean it. Lord knows they don't most of the time." He is shy, he says he's sorry, and she thanks him. And then right back to the conversation: "Anyway, I'm the one who found her. Strangled. Cops think it was my brother." They discuss how, even in Bill's jaded "anyone is capable of anything" world, Jason Stackhouse is not capable of pulling off two murders, emotionally or intellectually. He can barely pull off breakfast.

-- Page 10 --

"Apparently there's this vampire bar where Maudette and Dawn used to hang out at, in Shreveport." Bill's not loving this, but he acquiesces: "Fangtasia." Even Sookie understands how queer this is, but Bill explains that most vampires are very old, and thus think puns are funny. Which makes them seem less scary if you think about it that way, except they are more scary, because it's a lie. It's called Fangtasia because it's a stupid name, and stupid things are safe. If you convince yourself -- like Jason in bed, like Maudette getting tied up -- that you're just in a movie about your life, you're less worried about living through it.

Sookie's manner changes, as Bill is being easily fifty times more adorable than he has ever been. "Well, I was thinking if I went there I could do some sniffing around. You think maybe you could take me?" Bill's sexy and excited, and asks if they should go tonight. They agree to meet at her house so she can change and he can flirt with her grandmother. Sookie runs off to tell Sam, but quickly turns: "I'm asking you this as a friend, okay? This is not a date." He agrees, a bit too easily, and she reiterates the point. He agrees again, and she finally chuckles because he's being unbelievably cute for the first time ever. You don't have to read somebody's thoughts to know that they have a personality; apparently you just have to get through four episodes of a show about them. He watches her go, affectionate/creepy as ever. Inside, Sam's none too happy about the field trip, pointing out that "I'll be fine" is code for "I am about to have all of my blood drained and I'm walking into it willingly," as any horror movie fan knows.

Sookie points out that bloodthirst is not solely a fang trait: "People want to see my brother hang for a crime he didn't commit. Is that what you want?" She's horrified because after all she's been telling people he supports the VRA, and Sam says he's fine with vamps having bars, he just doesn't think people should go there. Sookie calls this "separate but equal," and he says to leave off the equal part: "We can give 'em *more* than we got. Just so long as everything's separate." He knows the line, between life and death. Everybody else keeps forgetting. Sookie tells him there's nothing she can do to stop her, he agrees because he's ever so much in love, and then suddenly he is alone, violently hot, and in possession of exactly one trashy waitress, of a usual three, on his busiest night of the year.

-- Page 11 --

Later, after they've chatted with Adele and she's changed into an honestly ravishing dress that -- working on the "short skirts = tips" method she's perfected -- seems designed to show off as much hot artery action as possible. Also a large amount of boobs. She looks amazing. Finally she asks quiet Bill what he's thinking, and he reminds her that their whole literally undying love affair of creepiness and mutual culture clash is based on her loving the silence. "...You won't care for it," he adds, and finally admits she looks "like vampire bait." She laughs at him, but as usual he is All Business. "I promised your grandmother no harm would come to you at Fangtasia tonight. I'm not sure I'm gonna be able to keep that promise with you dressed like this." Sookie's amazing here, blending her usual blunt sweetness with his continuing education: "So are you saying you think I look nice?" He's charmed, but for once ahead of the curve: "Doesn't matter what I think. This isn't a date, remember?" Smarty-pants Bill? Totally hot. Sookie's all OMG about it, even.

Tara bitches to herself, taking produce back into the freezer, and is startled by a strangled scream from Jason, telling her not to look at him. Look at what? Picture this: Jason Stackhouse on the floor of a meat locker, pants and undies down around his ankles, with a raw steak on his junk. At first I thought he was... It would be indelicate to say, although I

guess that too would bring the swelling down. Tara's like, "The fuck?" and Jason's ashamed explanation is that he may have OD'd. Tara completely flips into her other personality and is like, "OMG what will we do, what was it, what did you put in your mouth" and he admits it was his first time with V... And in seconds has revealed his source: Lafayette. "My cousin is dealing vampire blood now? Goddamn idiot. Least that explains why I walked in on you dancing around in that Laura Bush mask yesterday. Because I gotta tell you, without a reason, that was some fucked up shit." He laughs and groans, but like, we knew the reason and it was *still* fucked up.

"All right, let me see it. How long have you had the erection?" Jason's flabbergasted that she's seen through his meat disguise, but she's like, um, "I read? You're not the first vain-ass, body-conscious ex-jock to overdo the V and wind up with an acute case of priapism... Now lift the ribeye, and let me see what we're dealing with." Tara jumps back a few feet but contains the squeal within. It's bad. "Sweetie, we gotta get you to a hospital now." He protests, out of fear and shame, but she tells him in no uncertain terms that it's a matter of life and dick. "Don't Fear The Reaper" plays us into the next scene, as though to comfort Jason's little friend on its new adventure.

-- Page 12 --

The song goes techno as Bill and Sookie join the line up to the door. There are gothards, vampsdorks, a hot pair of mixed-sex vamps a go-go. You know they're vamps because they dance so zoomy. It's like... That moment in college where you start wondering if everybody's maybe bisexual and what the world would look like if that were true, with a lot of black leather and makeup. It's sad like a goth club, and dorky like '80s Night, and scary like swingers are scary and desperate. What is it about bisexuality that it goes hand in hand with dog collars so often?

Bouncer Pam... Oh, Pam. I don't know how else to describe her beyond the whole Kylie + Botox thing, right now, but it's pretty intense. She's in a much crazier costume than anybody else, like a dominatrix with five cats at home. She snarkily congratulates Bill on his "mainstreaming" and gestures toward Sookie: "Who's the doll?" Sookie holds out her hand as Bill introduces them, but this earns a quick head-shake from Bill: This is his world; he knows she's not sure of the rules. No touching. Pam asks to see her ID, and Sookie remarks on how funny it is to be carded in a club for immortals. "I can no longer tell human ages. We must be careful, we serve no minors... In any capacity." Yikes. She hands it back and congratulates Sookie on being twenty-five -- "how sweet it is!" -- and all this under Bill's watchful eye. I think he likes her. Pretty sure I do too.

Bill escorts Sookie into the club; behind the zoomy dancers there's a sign on the wall ordering NO BITING ON PREMISES. There's a merch table selling Fangtasia t-shirts and crap. They should call it Fangtasia! with that thrilling hint of excitement at the end. Sookie pronounces it a Disneyland version of what she was imagining; that's exactly what it is. Fangbait. "Don't get too comfortable. It tends to get more authentic as the night wears on." And who's that trip-trapping away in five tons of makeup, a dog collar, and a look of absolute fear? Creepy little Neil Jones from Kentucky, the new Coroner's Apprentice. So many jokes, of both "Mickey Mouse/broomsticks" and "leave your job at work" varieties, but one look at his face as he scuttles off is really enough.

*Forty thousand men and women everyday redefine happiness... The curtains flew then he appeared/ Saying don't be afraid/ Come on baby/ And she had no fear/ And she ran to him/ Then she started to fly/ They looked backward and said goodbye/ She had become like they are..."*

-- Page 13 --

To the bar, where that gorgeous Alex "Kingdom Come" Ross painting of Dubya as a vampire feeding on Lady Liberty hangs. I think we'd all like to put that in the background of our TV shows, but you'd be hard pressed to find a better one than this. A Native American Vampire American is working the bar, with his fangs out. (I bet he gets better tips that way, too.) He's got long straggly black hair, a kind of crazy eye, and a generalized menace: Long Shadow. Like most of the vamps on the show, he manages to strike a pose somehow charmingly disingenuous, ruinously silly, and totally frightening all the same time. It's a whole Max Schreck thing they've got going on. Bill checks out the go-go boy and asks Long Shadow if Sookie can ask him questions, and she shows him pictures of Maudette and Dawn. He recognizes them both. "Great, thank you. And do you also happen to remember who they hung around with?" Obviously, that's not something they notice. Obviously, that's not something she is going to be noticing either, if she's smart. She is. "Okay, then, thank you. I appreciate you taking the time."

Long Shadow reconsiders, holding up the picture of Dawn: "This one. She wanted to die." Sookie asks how he knows. I would too, she seemed like a together kind of chick. "Everyone who comes here does in their own way," he says atmospherically, and keeps going even after Bill's hard look: "That's who we are: Death." In case you didn't get the memo.

Bill pays, and they for a table; Sookie stares as they go. The crowd seems about half-and-half; there's a whole cadre of dog-collared weirdos staring up at the go-go boy like he's a god. No touching. They're hungry for something. It's hot as a fever, hot like rain. A balding man with a '70s nerdstache tries desperately to get his feet to move to the back of the bar. (*Oh my God, he's so powerful. So beautiful. The closer I step, the more beautiful he gets... You can do this. Just walk up there and offer yourself to him...*)

"A gin and tonic's pretty much a gin and tonic no matter where you drink it," Sookie tells Bill, putting on a brave face; he smiles and says he knows what she means. The balding man seems to be licking the shoes of a man on the throne in the back of the bar: shoulder length blonde hair, eyes lazy but watchful, like a housecat. That's Eric. He's awesome. He watches the go-go dancers while Sook watches him; Bill's ironic about her noticing him, and a little jealous: "Everyone does. That's Eric. He's the oldest thing in this bar." (Or is it something more? Does he make Bill feel like Andy Bellefleur, in addition to [Blair Waldorf](#)? But then, Bill's a model of self-control, he'd never abuse his privileges like Andy does. Right? As long as you call him what he wants to be called, and treat him like a king of this world.)

-- Page 14 --

Nerdstache touches Eric's leg, and without even blinking Eric kicks his body high into the air; he breaks a table as he's going down, and the vampires all get hungry from the blood; even the go-go dancers get so super zoomy. The bar becomes uglier, and darker; a girl who's like the ghost of the girl [Shirley Manson](#) wanted to be fifteen years ago appears. "Hi, I'm Taryn," she says. Bill seems both ashamed and a little bit excited about blowing Sookie's mind with all this sudden bizarre vampire shit: "Still think you're in Disneyworld?" And across the floor, Taryn picks up baldy-nerd right off the floor. Five second rule!

The trauma care doctor takes Jason's vitals while Tara watches -- shining a light in the eyes of her male companion, I mean to say -- and asks Jason if he's done any drugs, which is to say, asks Jason what kind of drugs he's on. Jason sits there adorably kicking his feet with a huge boner ever-so-slightly grazing his chin and lies through his teeth. When the doctor gets to the V, he throws a hissy fit and makes a hilarious "ugh" face at Tara, like, how gross is the doctor for even thinking of that? I don't think I've ever seen such a fine bad-at-lying person in all my years. I could watch him incompetently lie all day, it's hilarious. The doctor knows exactly what's going on, and finally just pulls the sheet up. He shines a light between Jason's legs -- the blood flows more freely down there -- and looks at it. "Oh, boy! Sure glad I'm not you. That looks kind of like an eggplant, what with that color and the way it's all swollen up at the end." Tara comes close to barfing.

"Ordinarily, we like to treat this in stages. First and least radical being an injection of anti-inflammatory drugs into the penis." Jason laughs that the *least* radical thing involves sticking a needle in his best feature, but the doctor clears up right away that Jason's past that point. "In my opinion, we need to aspirate." Jason stares at him, and he's like, "I need to drain the blood out of your penis." A baby starts crying, somewhere in the hospital, as Jason's eyes go wide. Maybe it's his dick, I don't know.

The doctor gets the needle ready and Tara takes off, but Jason grabs her. "Look, I will admit to sometimes having a sick curiosity about medical shit, but I ain't that fucking curious." He grabs her again, in tears, and begs her to stay with him. Tara says she'll never be the same after this, and he's like, "Tell me about it."

-- Page 15 --

"I don't think we can afford the time it would take to sedate you. Besides, without knowing what other substances you've taken, I don't want to risk a drug interaction." Who watches the watchers? He's the king of this world, and without Jason telling him the truth he can't begin to tell him about the horrors of V. He's just another dumb stud, like Tara said. It's important to enjoy your job. Jason begins to moan with fear, and she starts coaching him in breathing through it. They aspirate through the aspiration, hilariously, and he counts down; the doctor, of course, sticks it in just before he gets to "one." Jason's scream echo across the entire country, to like where even dogs could hear it.

At this point in time, Sam's cleaning glasses and looking sadly at a picture pinned to the bar. Arlene feels silly asking him to walk her to her car, but he tells her not to. "Not with what's been going on." And pregnant Arlene, still thinking sex earns you misfortune, that it has a morality and agenda, that if you sleep with the wrong kind of people -- which is to say, the people that Arlene thinks you shouldn't have sex with -- you deserve what you get. So she feels silly for being afraid of the *serial killer on the loose*, because he won't attack her, because she never fucked a vampire and thus doesn't deserve it. "Can't be too safe, you know?" Sam knows. The music gets scary as he puts an extra pair of gloves in his pocket and turns off the lights over the bar. The picture: Dawn and Sam, grinning wildly.

I am ... so sure Sam killed those girls. I mean, it's a good story: fuck a vampire, Sam kills you/Sam's in love with Sookie/Sookie's dating a vampire. Except that A) Sam is totally adorable and needs to be on the show forever, B) Sam's sex stuff is completely different from this person's MO, but most importantly C) Dawn was not only his friend, but also his employee and tenant. He'd be cutting himself off from revenue both professionally and personally if he killed her. I know Merlotte's is doing well enough that he can afford to hire

and fire crazy women at will, but you don't want to leave yourself short-handed. Plus, if he kills Sookie next, it will just be him, Lafayette and Big John against his least reliable employees, Arlene and Tara, who are also the two biggest bitches in the entire parish. Self-preservation, Sam: a huge priority for most serial killers.

Boy: (*How come no one fucked me? I got a dog collar too...*) Yeah, but you look like Clay Aiken.

-- Page 16 --

Bartender, I think, to a woman with an ill-designed personal support system: (*How'd you like me to rip that tape off your tits?*) Who would ever enjoy that? You say you want to know what I want, but I don't think you really mean it.

Frat Guy Alpha: (*It ain't gay if a guy's a vampire, is it?*) It's not necessarily gay anyway. Sometimes things happen. Don't worry overmuch about it.

Frat Guy Beta: (*I'm gonna get in a fight if I don't fuck a vampire tonight...*) How great would it be if that tranny gay panic "you're a dude!" nightmare happened, only it was "you're a human!" Because it wouldn't really be about silly primal sex fear, but about the opposite of that, like, "What a waste of time since you couldn't even kill me if you tried, you dick."

Bill asks if she's picking up anything: no, nothing beyond the constant stream of sex, sex, sex. (And you know, this is one of the few times that those overheard things actually were about sex, which is ironic because they're in a vampire bar, which is actually about the not-sex things those thoughts are usually about.) Bill's cute some more about how you don't have to be telepathic to notice that a roomful of people in black leather and their nipples showing are thinking about sex. Pam speaks to Eric, and they look over at our guys; Bill says a quiet "Uh oh." Sookie panics and informs him that vampires are under no circumstances "supposed to say *uh-oh*," and Bill says Eric's already scanned her twice, and he's about to summon them. "He can do that?" she says, but I'm confused about what that means. (He can scan her? Which is what exactly, and what did he hear, and is she immune to her mind being read and can vampires read your mind. Or, he can summon them? Which is two fingers in the air. And there they go.) Bill takes her hand and leads her across the floor like a princess and her prince, or a *pas de deux*.

"Bill Compton. It has been a while." Eric's well aware of Bill's "mainstreaming," and notes -- as his eyes slide down the length of Sookie -- that it seems to be going well. Bill makes to introduce them, but Eric already knows her name. "I never forget a pretty face," Pam smiles, and points to her head: "You're in my vault." Sookie's like, "Awesome. Nice to meet you." Eric shakes, a little bit, sometimes. Like something contained: "Well, aren't you sweet," and Sookie answers without thinking, to Bill's horror: "Not really." This is his world, she doesn't know the rules. He squeezes her hand. Pam and Eric talk in Viking for a second about how their zoo is getting bigger, and Eric turns to her again. And out comes the Muppet voice.

-- Page 17 --

[Alexander Skarsgård](#), you beautiful bastard, everything about you is so perfect at all times and then, randomly: Kermit the Frog. And you know, it's not random, it's actually very specific: It's whenever he's putting on a voice on top of his voice, so he's having to speak his 99.99% impeccable English, in a specific accent, and then do a third or fourth accent on top

of that, it all falls apart and he talks like Kermit. Only a Swedish person could manage to combine "Big Gay Al" and "Kermit The Frog" into the same voice. So if you know that about him (and he really is just about the best actor, in addition to being physically perfect) then you know what's going on: he's acting. In this scene, I mean, Eric Northman is acting. He's being something he's not. And I think what he's doing is trying to make Sookie comfortable, or condescend to her in some way he thinks is *noblesse oblige*, which is in itself telling.

"If you have anything to ask, you should ask it of me," he says, shaking again. Sookie shows him the pictures, and he smiles. "Well, this one offered herself to me. But I found her too pathetic for my attentions." Sookie nods, like, I got it, you're the king of the world. "Now this one, however... I have tasted." Pam remembers them both. "On account of the vault?" For that one, Bill squeezes her hand twice as hard; Eric's not exactly impressed either. Pam's kind of over all that, though, and just keeps going: "Never had either of them, though. They weren't really my type..." I think Pam acting like she's going to get full-on lesbian in your face all the time is her way of busting your chops, that's what I think. Sookie thanks them, and Kermit gives a giant, terrifying, shaky grin. It's like he's gritting his teeth to keep from dancing.

-- I'm not finished with you yet. Please... Sit." Bill nods, and Kermit tells him to sit down too. "Are you quite attached to your friend?" Bill and Sookie agree that she's "Mine," and for once Sookie doesn't rankle. I think I'd want Eric fully aware of that. I wonder how much of this conversation -- the voices, the shaking, the staring -- is a glamour never touching down. "What a pity," Eric says with a total fangbait look at her veins and stuff, "...For me." Sookie isn't unflattered, but as usual with vampires being all sexy at her, she's still about three bus stops behind. It's hard to get over the cold dead bodies that drink blood part. Unless, I guess, you're anybody else in the whole club.

-- Page 18 --

*"Hot as a fever/ Rattling bones/ I can just taste it... If it's not forever/ If it's just tonight/ It's still the greatest/ And you, your sex is on fire... Consumed with what's to transpire/ And you, your sex is on fire..."*

Bill isn't loving sitting with them, but then that's fine because we're done with them. (*My backup was supposed to be here fifteen minutes ago. I can't handle a raid on my own. These fucking vampires...*) Sookie immediately says they have to get out of there, and ignores Bill's warning tone: "Eric, the cops are coming. There's gonna be a raid." Eric asks angrily if she's a narc, but she points to the guy; he protests that they're not doing anything wrong and she hears Nerdstache suddenly, in the lav (*Go ahead and do it. Open me up. I don't care. Make me feel something*), about to get all kinds of eaten by Taryn. Pam asks how she knows all this crap, and Bill shakes his head selfishly at her.

I mean, it's not like they're going to eat her for being psychic, and she doesn't have to make her weaknesses pubic either, about the silence with the vampires. He is selfish because she can only use this to establish notoriety and relationships with other vampires, once they know she has skills, and then she stops being his little secret. I mean, we'll see, but I can't think of any other reason he'd be so insistent that she not demonstrate what makes her interesting to this interesting pair. As awful and queerbutt as Fangtasia! is, remember, it's still a room full of the only things in the universe Sookie knows about so far that make her feel less alone. If they weren't all about bad idea sex, plus the murder and bloodsucking, this

would be a totally great hangout for her, both in the Mole On The Face way and in the Enjoy The Silence way too. Too bad vampires are creepy and gross and fuck everything up all the time.

Anyway, before Sookie can stammer and do that google-eyed innocent thing she does, the cops burst in, and Eric and Pam usher them offstage and away through a side door in superfastvampiremotion. "I enjoyed meeting you. You will come again," says Eric as Bill sweeps her into his arms in one great movement, and all four of them zoom around like they're on a people mover. I miss them both already.

Tara drives back from the hospital and watches Jason -- who's tuckered out, after all, he's had a big day -- and remembers the day she fell in love with him. She was just tiny, but she was Tara: she'd trashed her mother's liquor too late to do any good, and Momma Thornton was chasing her through the streets. She hammered at the Stackhouses' door, begging to come in, as Momma came closer, and when Jason answered the door it was to tell her Sookie wasn't home. He spotted Momma coming up toward the door and pushed Tara behind him, looking up at her. He was so small. He looked up at Momma and asked, quite serious, if there was a problem. "You bet your tiny white ass there's a problem. Little bitch hid my Captain Morgan!" Tara explained angrily that she didn't hide it, she threw it out, and Jason explained that while Gran was at the market he wasn't to let anyone in. Momma grabbed him, twisting his shirt in her hand like a claw, and he didn't blink. "Maybe I should call Sheriff Dearborne, so he can come out here and throw you in jail. Where I guarantee ain't no Captain Morgan gonna be waiting for you." Tara stood behind him, nodding, and Momma stepped back. "This ain't over," she said, as he was slamming the door in her face. Tara smiles down at him, feeling safe all over again.

-- Page 19 --

Also driving, on another road, Bill listens to Dengue Fever's "Escape From Dragon House," seething at how easy it is, for Eric to make him feel powerless and young. Sookie asks him to turn it down, and asks what it is. "Cambodian. You don't like it?" Sookie turns it off, and asks him to pull over. "I need things to ... stop."

In a clearing off the road, Sookie just asks for a couple of minutes to chill out. We all take them, we should all take them more often, but for Sookie it's more important than that. He tells her to take her time, and she's sorry for getting him in trouble. "Don't apologize. We vampires are always in some kind of trouble." She looks at Bill finally; he continues to be amazing and intense. "I prefer to be in it with you." And when he leans in to kiss her, none of those Stay Away feelings seem to matter.

The night lights up, and there's the sound of siren. A cop knocks on the door, and Sookie quietly tells Bill to let her do the talking. This is her world, the daytime world, and she knows the rules. The cop flashes his lights around the inside of the car, and she explains they're coming home from a date. "Uh huh. We were raiding a bar not too far from here, y'all coming from there by any chance? It's called Fantasia. That ring any bells?" His voice gets meaner. He's the king of this world. "How about you, son? You seem awful quiet. Don't you talk?" Bill doesn't look up, resentful and offended. "I'm a man of few words." The cop is condescending; Sookie watches Bill and worries. The cop asks to shine his light on her neck, and Bill's fangs come out; she pulls her hair back.

"Why don't you ask her if you can shine it between her legs?" asks Bill, a Tara Thornton move if ever there were one. The cop's incensed; Sookie hisses Bill's name warningly, and covers her neck up quick. "Vampires sometimes like to feed from the femoral artery. The blood flows more freely down there, so one doesn't have to suck as hard." He turns his face into the light, game face on: "Or so I've been told." What is with Bill and Sookie's groin? ...Oh, right.

The cop aims his gun in Bill's face, and Bill looks deeply into his eyes. The sound of a rattle plays out across the landscape, and before you know it, it's done. "I like your gun," Bill says seductively. "It's a beautiful weapon." The cop thanks him, and hands it over at Bill's request. Sookie tells Bill to cut it out, but we're not in the daytime world anymore.

They were the kings of this world. For centuries. They took what they wanted. They were adored, in the shadows, and they ruled the night. It's not as simple as Tru Blood, it's not even as simple as sex: it's taking a full-grown man and calling him a child just to expect that your authority means anything. It's insult, on insult, and it ends now.

-- Page 20 --

"It's heavier than I imagined," Bill says, drinking him in. "Is it loaded?" The cop looks at him, fascinated in the eldest sense. Sookie informs him quietly that he is *freaking her out*, but he can't look away. Neither of them can. Bill points the officer's gun at him. "Now, you listen to me, officer. I do not take kindly to you shining your light in the eyes of my female companion. And as I have more than a hundred years on you, I do not take kindly you to calling me *son*. So the next time you pull somebody over on suspicion of being a vampire, you better pray to God that you're wrong. Because that vampire may not be as kind to you as I'm about to be. I'm not gonna kill you, but I am gonna keep your gun. Does that sound fair?" They were kings of this world, for so long. The cop agrees. "Yes what?" Yes, *sir*. Just call him what he wants to be called.

Bill pulls the gun off him and the spell breaks; the cop still can't move, terrified. Having seen what powerlessness really is, what it's like to have a gun in your face and no power at all. To realize your power was only ever part of the pretense, that the rule of law extends only to those who agree to follow it. The spell breaks. "Now, you have a nice night," says Bill, and starts the car. Sookie stares at him as they drive away. The cop stands in the clearing, alone with fear, unable to move. He pisses himself, and begins to cry.

A begloved Sam Merlotte lets himself into Dawn's house with his key, as is a man's prerogative. The screen slams shut behind him. He follows his nose to the bedroom, sniffing all the way. He smells the bedding piled at the foot of the bed and climbs onto it, impossibly lithe. His body stretches across to her pillow; he inhales the scent deeply, gratefully. Lovely broken Dawn, with the voice like angels and parakeets; funny Dawn with her gun, and those short-short-shorts. The smell of her death, the death she wanted, the death she went looking for: it's all around him.

*"Can't you smell that smell?/ The smell of death surrounds you... Angel of darkness is upon you... Say you'll be alright come tomorrow, but/ Tomorrow might not be here for you.../ Got a monkey on your back/ Just one more fix, Lord, might do the trick/ One hell of a price for you to get your kicks..."*

Sam twists himself into the sheets, writhing with it. It is a funeral.

## DRIVER'S ED

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 5 | Aired on 10.05.2008

*Sparks Fly Out* - Bill meets Bon Temps; Jason gives V -- and Lafayette -- another chance, with wild consequences; Tara's heart is broken once again; Sam shows us a little bit of the beast; there's a death in the family.

Adele Stackhouse finally gets her Descendents of the Glorious Dead meeting with Bill, and she's holding it at a church. It goes swimmingly, as Bill has had 150-something years to perfect his public speaking skills, although Sookie's dumping of Bill after last week's police-glamouring hijinks provide a bit of weirdness. Of particular interest in attendance are Andy Bellefleur's brother Terry (an Iraq vet who's won over based on Bill's experiences in the Civil War) and three random hicks who act like idiots. Hoyt and his mother continue to be adorable and hilarious respectively, and a good time is had by all.

Particularly Jason, who spends the episode a tripping darling thanks to the little square of blotter V given him by Lafayette as a necessary inoculation for what's clearly coming: enjoying the life force in all things, touching people idiotically like he's on E, telling Hoyt and Rene how much he loves them, and declaring his newfound eternal adoration for the bewildered and permanently pissed off Tara Thornton. Then he fucks a newly divorced ho behind the bar and rubs garbage on her, because he has lost the plot entirely.

While everybody else is at Merlotte's celebrating first contact -- or, in Lafayette's case, busting the rednecks' asses ninja style for being homophobic assholes, in a truly amazing display of the power of a "V plus how angry you get being gay and black in a small southern town" cocktail -- Bud and Andy visit Bill at his home, where memories of his siring and subsequent loss of his family have been awakened. He allays their suspicions for the murders, and scares the piss out of them in the meantime.

Sam and Sookie go on a date after the meeting that ends up going sour after he gets jealous and possessive about her history with Bill. He's like a dog with a bone! Sookie ends up taking a cab... And slipping around in the blood of the third murder victim when she gets home. We'll miss you, Gran. Rest in peace.

Hopefully.

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Bill and Sookie arrive at the Stackhouse house, some awkward and short but not short enough time after their experience with the cop last week. There's Tuvan throat singing accompanying the first shot, which is a creepy kind of haunted thing, which will make sense by the end. They sit in the car for awhile before Bill starts justifying himself. Which he can't really do, because the truth is too deep and touches on too many icky things about power and powerlessness, so he just sounds like a rationalizing rationalizer: "We've had a difficult relationship with law enforcement for many years. The man provoked me! I could've done much worse." Sookie points out that that's hardly comforting, and floats the idea that Bill would've just killed him if she wasn't around. Bill is offended, like, why would she even go there -- him being a centuries-old killer and all -- but can't deny that even if he didn't kill the cop, he would have fed on him, probably, a little bit.

"See, that's just crazy! You would've fed on him, then tossed him aside like an old chicken bone!" And you wouldn't even have called the next day! Bill superzooms around the car and opens her door for her, giving her a little tiny wiggins, and Bill repeats his mantra from last week, that he's trying to mainstream. "Suckin' the blood from a police officer is not mainstreaming! Neither is hosting orgies! Or listening to crazy Chinese gargling!" Bill explains about the Tuvan throat singing, which Sookie doesn't even bother to think about before blowing it off; it's cool because overtone singing is all about weird things you didn't think the human body, or at least your human body, was capable of doing, and now there's Bill who has a vested interest in what mysteries the human body is still capable of manifesting and Sookie who has a vested interest in disinterest at this moment as far as learning new things. "Tuvan? I don't even know where that is."

Bill calls to her, whining that it's a terrible thing to be frightened of "everything you don't know in this world," and Sookie replies that her world, such as it is, is opening up "mighty fast," and though it's boring, it's safe. Which, between the creepy orgies at Bill's house and the creepy orgies at Eric's bar, "sounds pretty good about now." She tells him to fuck off and stop helping, basically, that she can get to the door herself, and all of a sudden he's all, "I won't call on you again." That's all it took! The scene feels like it's longer, but it's not: she just tells him that being threatened with death a billion times, watching creepy people have creepy sex all over the place, and then having Bill act like a total fucking freak: that's the line. He gets back in the car to leave, and the music goes all insane! Because that stupid dog! Is watching Sookie fish for her keys in her purse!

-- Page 2 --

After the credits get done doing bad things with you, lo there is a great shaking and pounding at Lafayette's door, to which he responds as usual by picking up a baseball bat. Because it's a TV show we only see it when it's important but I like to imagine that Lafayette's entire day is just people knocking wildly at his door, and him responding with suspicion. Like right before this, ten random people showed up pounding on his door, one after the other, and he had tell them basic shit about living life. How does he get any sleep? Anyway, Tara comes walking in and immediately starts hurling everything she can get hands on at his head. He bats them away easily: "Bring it on, hooker. I was all-parish in high school."

Lafayette's cousin Tara freaks out on him for dealing V -- "get your ass killed" is a representative phrase -- and he tells her that frankly she could use the perspective it provides, but he's just being cute. He asks if she's more angry that he's dealing this particular drug among all the drugs he deals among all the illegal revenue streams he generates, or if this is about Jason Stackhouse. It is always about Jason Stackhouse. "Givin' vampire blood to Jason Stackhouse is like givin' HoHos to a diabetic! You know he can't control himself." Lafayette points out that he couldn't have been more clear about how to use the incredibly potent drug -- which is sparingly -- and Jason couldn't have been more adorably retarded by overdosing. "I had to take him to the ER. They drained his penis with a needle the size of an ice pick. Twice. *It was the most disturbing shit I've ever seen in my entire life!*" He tries to calm her down, but it's the tone when she says, "He suffered, Lafayette," that gets him. He promises to check on Jason later, and as he lights a Swisher asks WTF point there is in coming to his house at 3AM to throw things. "It! Makes! Me! Feel better!" He smiles: valid.

A few hours later it's morning, and some crazy lady is haranguing Gran on the phone while she makes breakfast, all, "Shame on you! A vampire is a perversion of humanity and you, vampire lover, are perverting our community by bringing one into the open! I don't care what sort of wretches you keep in your own home, but when you bring freaks and abominations into our churches in front of our children, you will..." Adele, interested in neither talking shit about Sookie nor about Bill Compton, tries to calm the bitch down and tells her to hear what he has to say before picking up her pitchfork and calling a lynching, but you know how people are when they're afraid. Sookie comes in looking for some breakfast, and the lady's yelling at Adele about how she's going to hell, and Adele hangs up: "All right, same to you. Bye, now!"

-- Page 3 --

She tries to put a brave face on things, spinning the constant phone ringing as "excitement" about the big DGD meeting tonight and not pants-shitting angry fear. Gran segues into asking about Sookie's non-date last night, and Sookie snorts. "Am I really that much of a lost cause, you gotta pin all your hopes for me on a vampire?" Instead of telling her to stop being a bitch, Adele just says that Bill's a nice man. Sookie hisses that he's neither. "I know that if I had a chance to know somebody who'd experienced the world differently, I'd see it as a blessing and not something to be scared of. Or hate." Man, she's awesome. But between that hilarious phone signoff a second ago and this little speech now, I'm thinking there's a bell tolling somewhere. Oh no, it's right here: the phone ringing and ringing even as Sookie's saying, "I don't hate him, I just don't want to be his girlfriend." Adele pretends she can't hear it, and then when Sookie insists that it's actually ringing, assures her the machine will get it.

It's interesting because both of these scenes are saying the same thing, which is: your world is getting bigger. You are getting bigger. The only scary part is the doing; the world on the other side is pretty much just like right now, only slightly awesomer. If you've seen *American Beauty* and/or watched *Six Feet Under*, marshal those forces now, because we're about to watch two different shows. One of them, the show I'm comfortable watching, takes place in a world where nothing is scary, just unknown. Drugs in and of themselves are not evil, because that's just some shit Nancy shoved down our throat she didn't even believe herself, so she'd feel like less of a hypocrite about her husband selling our country and our world for magic beans. Sex is not in and of itself evil, etc. There are a million ways the human body can be employed that we don't know about yet, and I'm not interested in trying most of them, but I can't see why it matters what somebody else does and if I'm okay with that.

The other is a show I'm less interested in watching, which is one in which sex, death and drugs are so terrible and unnatural and ugly that we can't even talk about them, or look at them in a particular context or from a particular angle, because they all mean the same thing, for everybody, for all time. What Jason Stackhouse needs most is a horse to ride, through the wilderness, because what he is, is terribly sad and terribly afraid, and walking takes too long. Lafayette knows that he needs a horse, and knows the perfect solution to the question that is plaguing Jason. Because what Jason's never, ever done, in the midst of all that fucking, is understand why we do it.

-- Page 4 --

I firmly believe -- like Bill, like Adele, like Lafayette -- that anything sufficiently known is incapable of being scary, because to know sufficiently is to love. So when I say Lafayette is the guide, and the only character who is always right, that's what I'm talking about. The cruelest and the wisest thing anyone can do is remove your training wheels. All story but particularly this story is about removing as many things from the bicycle as possible: training wheels first, and then the seat can go, and who needs handlebars, and those gears never did you any favors, and pretty soon the wheels themselves are gone, and soon you'll be flying. Lafayette is sinister to the degree that drugs are sinister, which are sinister to the degree that freedom is sinister and terrifying, which is a lot.

Jason slowly slides a meat thermometer all the way through a sausage, staring intensely at Lafayette; the last centimeter or so are a sudden jerk. "Yeah. Just like that. And no anesthesiar, either. First, I get hauled in by the cops, then I gotta let a dude drain my johnson." They talk about how much they love each other and Jason starts lecturing Lafayette that he better stop selling V, because it's entirely possible that somebody else will be completely retarded and take a whole shitload of it before going into police custody and wouldn't that be sad if it happened again, and Sheriff Dearborne thinks he's some kind of sex maniac (Lafayette is like, "You are!") and now things are fucked up with Tara. Whose spot Lafayette completely blows, as some kind of random craps throw: "She'll get over it. The girl's been lost in love with you since she was eight." Jason is stunned for like five seconds, because he had no idea, and that makes it worse, because when your identity is based on being desired, those who do are simultaneously more and less important than everybody else, so now Tara loving him makes her more important than her utility. "Gah! My life sucks so much ass! And it's all because of your fuckin' V!"

"Listen, don't blame the Ferrari just because your ass can't drive. You're gonna have to learn how to ride the high, boyfriend." Soon you'll be flying. Jason's story is being offered the things the rest of us are looking desperately for, and completely missing that they're there. Lafayette offers you transcendence and you see it as something to get fucked up on; Tara offers you her love and you fuck Maudette Pickens, of all people. Jason continues to blame the Ferrari; he has no idea anyone knew how to drive, or how they learned. "Go fuck some other people up with that shit! You broke me." Not yet, but soon. Then it can start. "If you can learn to control it, V will open up your mind to everything you're missing around you. That's what's gonna snap you out of all this shit." Hear that? We know, but in the context of the narrative there's no explanation for that last bit. Snap him out of what? Feeling sorry for himself, not knowing how to drive the Ferrari. Thinking the Ferrari is the point, and not where it takes you. "If done right..." Lafayette sips his coffee, seductive, and offers to teach him to drive.

-- Page 5 --

Lafayette lays out paper towel blotter squares on the coffee table, and explains the workings of the universe. You could call them mysteries, or secrets, but they're neither. "This is the life force of a vampire. They're just blood in a skin casing, ain't a whole lot different between a vampire and a boudin sausage, except for the blood. Our blood sustains life. This blood *is* life." He's hypnotic, poetic, frighteningly into it. It doesn't seem like patter. "One drop, that's all you need. Can't be greedy. Billions of molecules of pure, undiluted, twenty four-karat life. You take this in, and you take in a piece of the vampire it came from. Trick is, you have to let it take you deep." Jason stares, mouth open as Lafayette sniffs the dropper and squeezes drops onto the squares; he nods. Ordinarily phrases like "life force" are a little tricky, but there's honestly no better phrase: it's the difference

between a dead body, without passions or hungers or pains or fears, and a very much animated body, full of them all. And we, who are already alive?

Lafayette pops a drop into his mouth, and Jason's eyes go wide, like a little kid. Lafayette savors it, closing his eyes, and Jason asks what kind of vampire it is; what the qualities of the vampire are. Lafayette's eyes are hard to open. "He's new. So the blood is still a little wild? I can feel him in my muscles, making me strong..." Lafayette dances, waving softly back and forth in the wind, across the table; Jason stares, grinning. Everything is sex if you look at it right. "But you might get another side of him. The same V could affect you in a whole other way..." his breathing is labored as it comes on. "But I guarantee you'll see the world with new eyes." He slides a square across the glass, and Jason hesitates just a moment before placing it on his tongue. Jason can't believe he's doing it again, after the whole johnson-draining issue last night, but this is a different day. The sun came up on a different world today. A bigger world, and a more intimate one: This isn't a sale, it's not a pitch or a demo. Lafayette does things in a particular way, with a particular stance and a particular voice and a way of doing things; he keeps the vials in the refrigerator and demands cash up front. His personal stash, Lafayette's V, that he's sharing with a friend? This isn't a drug deal, it's communion. "Oh no, man. You're doing it for the first time."

Sookie spills ketchup on her hand at work and Arlene cracks a joke about Bill "getting a rise" out of seeing it on her skin; Sookie's response tells her all she needs to know. "Vamp club not all it was made out to be, huh? A lot of freaks, I hear. *And people from Arkansas.*" Heh. She starts to get all defensive about Bill possibly getting "all handsy" with Sookie, but she reminds her friend she can take care of herself. "And no," she tells Arlene and the suddenly very attentive Sam Merlotte, "I won't be goin' out with him again." Arlene and Sam share a glance, and Sookie admits that Fangtasia -- which, I really appreciate the lengths everybody's going to in order to avoid saying the word out loud, because that's the kind of shit you can write in a book but hell to say out loud -- was "kinda freaky." But, she points out, the world is getting bigger. "How are you ever gonna know until you go see for yourself?" Sam avoids the issue, and Arlene sweetly says, "I'm sorry it didn't turn out like you'd hoped, but ... Better it happens now than before you end up hurt, or dead." That's like the most reasonable I think Arlene has ever been.

-- Page 6 --

Sookie stares at her as she goes, and -- because she is no longer dating the vampire and who knows when they're going to hook back up, so he better take his chance -- Sam comes over and asks her out while everybody's watching: Descendants of the Glorious Dead meeting tonight, and then coffee after. Needless to say, he is adorable and nervous and more than a little intense while the transaction is going down, and then because it must happen in every episode, Sookie notices everybody staring at her and being part of the audience for her big romantic moment of the day. When Sookie points out that everybody's watching -- with fuckin' Andy Bellefleur right there in the middle of the shot -- Sam goes beyond hot into some kind of infrared area: "I know! You better say yes!" There's no way to do anything other than say yes to that. He gets a little taller, and orders everybody's eyes back on their plates, shooting her a shy grin even as he's growling at everybody else. She loves that bit.

Sookie brings Andy one of the ketchup bottles she's just married, and he awkwardly segues to her brother's fake affair with Tara. "Tara who? Tara Tara?" She laughs it off and tells him that there's nothing going on, and he silently gloats. (*I knew it. Tara ain't bangin' Stackhouse,*

*bitch lied to me.) Sookie tells him to watch his mouth, metaphorically, and he's shocked into literally telling himself what's going on while it's happening, for our benefit. (I know I didn't say anything, but I did think it! And you heard it! That means it's true, you can hear what people think...)* Sookie bounces back to grab some tea for him, and asks Sam where Tara is. He sends her to the ladies', a tiny amount of nervous about what happens next.

When Sookie walks in, Tara immediately asks why she didn't tell her she was going out with Sam. "Because it ... just happened?" She asks how Tara knew, and Tara's deadpan is hilarious as usual: "Arlene. She works fast." I love that, because there's literally no way that any of this could have happened, in the time that it took her to exchange two sentences with Andy, and it's time for this blatant fable to just come out and say so.

Sookie points out that it's not exactly a giant sex date, considering it involves attending a boring lecture about Our Racist Legacy with old people -- with Maxine Fortenberry, for God's sake -- in a church, and asks why she should even be justifying it in the first place. "I'm entitled to know what my girl's up to, ain't I?" Sookie nods and closes the door. "Yeah, about that. Why does Andy Bellefleur think you're seein' my brother?" Tara explains about her alibi/fake affair thing with Jason, and tells Sookie she only did it because they both know he's innocent, both of the crime and generally, and can't be trusted not to talk himself into trouble with the cops. Name me a way that Jason Stackhouse differs substantially

from [Previous](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#) [23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [26](#) [Next](#)

-- Page 7 --

">Starbuck, I dare you. With Lafayette for his Leoben, leading him gently by the hand down the rabbit hole of all the scary things he's been forgetting.

Tara gets incredibly shifty and suspicious-acting for no reason, leading Sookie to ask why she's being incredibly shifty and acting so suspicious, but when she tries to read her mind, all she hears is, excellently, "LALALALALALALALALALA." Which is better than "You're going on a date tonight with the same werewolf or whatever the hell he is that I just boned like yesterday, which is sort of creepy," but what makes it hilarious is the dead serious look on Tara's face as she's staring Sookie down, combined with the ridiculous sound of the voiceover. Try to be completely still and deadpan and intimidating while going "LALALALALA," you can't do it. But Sookie's entitled to know what her girl's up to, isn't she? Apparently not. Tara stomps away with a great stomping, all, "not every detail of everyone's personal life is your business!" and ordering Sam to keep Sookie away from her. I calculate that this fight will last three more seconds.

Sookie immediately runs to Andy Bellefleur -- sorry, "Detective" Bellefleur -- to completely change her story and say that in fact she was asserting a mistaken truth before and that she has noticed Jason and Tara "kind of sneakin' around lately," which is such an in-your-face contradiction that Andy's offended by her assumption that he's dumb enough to believe it. (Now she's coverin' for him too? Shit, don't look her in the eye...) Sookie suggests that Andy eat a dick, basically, and at least accuse her of lying "out loud." Which points to a greater frustration because she's flustered enough to exercise prior restraint, like, what makes it an accusation is saying it out loud, which he has not done, but also brings us to a more interesting and subtler place, which is: Sookie Stackhouse just came out.

The world is now sufficiently big enough, and there are things in it alien enough, that her little gift and the ways she can use it are less of a threat. Pretending to be something other than what you are is another kind of training wheel, and getting tired enough of waiting on the world to change around you that you stop worrying about it, stop looking at yourself through the filter of everybody else's eyes, and just be who you are. That's learning to drive. Listen: "Either way, I'm gonna hear you whether you look me in the eye or not." Out loud, like that: today.

-- Page 8 --

She compares the relative scarcity of ideas in his head to mice in a cage, and tells him she's sympathetic to his "grasping at straws" in the murder investigation, but warns him not to drag Jason down with him. Which is... pretty much exactly what the situation called for, because that's exactly what he's doing. I hate Andy Bellefleur for many reasons, but I can't shake this idea that he's so into closing the case and getting applause for solving the problem that he'd be okay with a dubious or wrong suspect, if it came down to it.

Hoyt's handing out programs at the church when his mother Maxine calls his name: she's yanking desperately at the crucifix at the head of the church, on the altar. She doesn't have the software for this yet, and she's doing her best: "Our guest of honor is a vampire. Adele plumb forgot that little fact when she booked the church for tonight. What do you think's gonna happen when he comes out and sees a giant cross?" Nobody knows, but Maxine's looking forward to Bill sizzling up like hybrid breakfast food "fatback bacon," a thing that exists to the same extent that vampires do. Hoyt steps up toward her to help, and is adorable some more: "Quit jerkin' on it!"

Or, okay, how about this. Did you ever think about antihistamines? Like, what they are? Your body is working overtime to protect you, getting all insane and trying to expel everything that comes inside, which results in misery, because your body has stopped being able to tell what's okay and what's worth hating. So you take antihistamines, right, to stop your body from doing its job. But that doesn't mean that being protected is bad, or that your allergic reactions don't serve a function, or that they aren't necessary in other circumstances. Your body knows what it's doing, but that doesn't mean you can't fine-tune it a little more. Teach it to hate more efficiently.

What Adele Stackhouse is trying to do here -- what Lafayette, and Bill, and Sam in his way are trying to do -- is perform an inoculation. A little bit of allergen, so your immune system knows how to deal with it, without overreacting and hurting you more than the thing would. But it doesn't mean you're not careful, it doesn't mean you don't hold onto that kernel of hate and remember and honor it, because the world is never going to be sufficiently large that you'll be entirely safe, no matter how much love you harbor in you for all the things in it. That's like turning off your immune system entirely, and breathing deep. Which is just as lazy and dogmatic as going the other way, and I think what Jason's going to be engaged in doing for the foreseeable future: letting greed drive is just as bad as fear.

-- Page 9 --

"Hi there, munchkins!" Adele reckons Arlene's children the youngest "history buffs" she's ever had at a DGD meeting, and Rene represents, as he will throughout the episode, the rubbernecks of the world, who look out at the trees and weeds and flowers through the glass; the ones that stay inside, with their allergies and secrets. "They wouldn't stay home

for nothing -- the minute they heard a vampire, they had to come." The Mayor approaches Adele next, asking if everybody's safe. She does that Gran thing where she pretends not to know what he means, because it's just too appalling to be true, and ends up telling him she's more worried about what their asses are going to do to Bill, not what Bill's going to do to their children. Bill sits in the kitchen of the church with a bottle of TruBlood, as still as a statue, not even blinking, listening to them: their chatter, their casual bigotry, the excitement of the crowd, their heartbeats, the blood in their veins.

Inside the chapel, Hoyt's on all fours on the altar, having no luck with the cross. It's a funny image but a good one, because what Hoyt's trying to do is give the church antihistamines. They've redefined this space as civil, not religious, for tonight, and yet the church stubbornly goes on being a church. I'm not a religious man, exactly, but I'm pretty grossed out by the idea of so casually moving that cross around like that, like, "Sorry God, not tonight. Could you come back later?" I mean, it's well-intentioned and underinformed and sweet, and God knows I love Hoyt Fortenberry, on all fours or otherwise, but it's still backwards and kind of fucked up.

Bill listens to Adele welcome Sookie and her date, Sam Merlotte. He doesn't move, but somehow flinches anyway.

Flinching more visibly: the appalled and staring -- and very much alone in this room, by the way, considering where they are and why -- Tara, watching the men hang up the Dixie flag. Word. I already said my piece about the "Glorious Dead" and the whole Civil War thing, but just to be clear: it's not okay. The little meeting is not okay. This little club? Not okay. Dixie flags? Not okay. Regardless of what you think or say it means to you or your family, put that shit away. We don't want to see it, and we don't want to make the assumptions about you -- that you are ignorant, ill-bred, hateful and aggressive trash -- that you're forcing us to make. The fact that you're wearing it proves those assumptions are correct, and you're looking for the fight. There are places where irony doesn't go, and symbols of hate are among them. You can't wear a swastika ironically without it proving you're an aggressive dick, and the same applies here, and you know it, and please spare me the complaints about that, too: wearing Dixie shit and reacting with that disingenuous shock when you're called out for being a racist tool is like hanging a rainbow flag outside your house and complaining that people keep treating you like a fag. Stop acting like a fag and they won't, you Nazi.

-- Page 10 --

Sam, Tara and Sookie have a three-way awkwardfest for three different reasons, and eventually they join her on the pew. "Come on in. Could always use more white people." I would just want the buffer, because how fucking fucked up would it be to sit there and like ... I would just spend the entire time wondering, like, "What if something happens and they suddenly get so excited about how white they are or how much they secretly hate black people and they just kind of ... go crazy and kill me?"

That's seriously where my thoughts would go, immediately. *I hope some weird unforeseen mob mentality mojo doesn't suddenly grip everyone post-hypnotically, or caves deep under the church don't release some kind of toxic hallucinogenic anger gas, or I hope the sun doesn't line up with Jupiter and like the Rukbat system far away in space, and that's it: I'm a goner. Even though I know all of these people and that sort of bizarre event has never actually happened in all of human history without at least a little warning. But on the other hand, what if they all know something or operate on shared assumptions I wouldn't even know about, and I'm not in on the*

*white joke, there's a white joke and I'm not in on it, so when they signal each other that it is time for my murder I won't even know it, or maybe they got here a half-hour earlier than they told me to come, so they could plan out their ambush, or what if all these meetings aren't even about Civil War memorabilia but in fact about how they are aliens who have infiltrated Renard Parish and I'm the last one that needs to be put in an alien pod and lose my personality to aliens, or else I'm the only person on earth and everybody else is robots. That is so fucked up, I can't even believe that, if it's true.*

"If you can learn to control it, V will open up your mind to everything you're missing around you." Jason stands outside the church and hears the voice of his guide. The flowers on the tree -- magnolias? -- shine with life, throwing sparks everywhere. It is beautiful, a rare moment: to see the life in a single flower, and to feel connected to it and through this moment come to the realization that you are connected to everything else in a deeply felt and unexpressible way, and that we are only the movements of God through time, expressing Himself through us, and His name is only love. Or else Jason's just all fucked up on drugs.

Some trash guys come in; you can tell that they are bad guys because they are smirky, wearing mesh caps and a thousand other signifiers that indicate their class and intellect, and the lead one is blonde and a bit of a beard. They bitch about how it's less like a vampire show and more like a zombiefest, due to all the old racists in attendance -- "More like Descendents of the Walking Dead," awesomely -- and they use the word "pick-'em-up" and generally act the way somebody from like Maryland thinks southern trash acts; they sit further back. Tara continues to wonder if white people are an elaborate prank, when the punchline walks in, staring right at her.

-- Page 11 --

I know a Bonnie Raitt song about sparks flying out across "the wilderness between me and you," which is a metaphor I love, obviously, and I recently wrote a recap that used the image of sparks in at least as many ways as this episode does, so I'm saying it's impossible to extricate from this episode my own recent thoughts and obsessions, and I have no idea about the title or where the song comes in, but I do know I'm quoting this for the second time in a month: "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards." It's such a strange, beautiful little image; normally you think of certainty in terms of gravity, but sparks do fly up. And Jason was born unto trouble for real, just like anybody else. I don't know, but it's from the book of Job, which is a story about pretty much the exact same thing: What if the entire world were an elaborate prank?

Jason watches -- and hears -- the sweat run down her neck, endorphins and adrenaline, water, sparks. There are certain kinds of crazy and a lot of drugs that imbue a relevance to things that they don't usually have. Things are more themselves; they have significance unto themselves, like the images on Tarot cards: The Dixie Flag. The Old Racist Bitch. The Girl With A Fan. The Sweat On Your Neck. The Feeling Of Walking. The Slow Motion. It's the first sweat and the last sweat that anybody ever sweated, in all the world it's a thing he's seen but never really seen. It runs wet, like blood, but it reminds him of sex, sweat on skin, and maybe he loves her back. Maybe he's in love with her, and always has been, but the world conspired to keep this knowledge away from him by distracting him with hobags and ADD and Alabama Thunderpussy, whatever that might be, and all the bullshit that keeps us apart, and keeps us from expressing that essential union between people, between spirits,

that is divinity meeting itself, saying "Hello," and "I remember," and "I know you," in a single kiss. Or else Jason's just all fucked up on drugs.

Jason's eyes are throwing sparks as he grins wildly at Tara, and sits beside her; his glassy look falls on everything at once, beautiful and significant and powerful and good. She courteously avoids from darting a glance at his dick, which I would not be able to do if I'd been through what they've been through: How are you and your penis doing today? She asks how he's feeling, and he answers honestly: "Oh, strong." She stares at him and he grins. "Alive." The world is good and all the things of and in the world are good. He's breathing deep, without an immune system.

-- Page 12 --

Maxine's solution was to drape the flag over the cross, which is disturbing in about sixty ways but mostly reminded me of this thing Edith Wharton wrote to somebody (Google says Barrett Wendell, July 19, 1919) that I've been obsessing on lately. It's not really that insightful about today's world, more like redundant, but it gives me the shits that she said it almost a hundred years ago: "How much longer are we going to think it necessary to be 'American' before (or in contradistinction to) being cultivated, being enlightened, being humane, & having the same intellectual discipline as other civilized countries?" I'll take this purely meaningless object that we imbue with meaning and drape it over this other purely meaningless object that we imbue with meaning, and somehow I have done something. And meanwhile, Bill's fangs are like a snake, he's a bucket of blood in a shapely sausage casing, and the only thing special about him is that his blood carries some kind of virus or something that makes you awesome. The Flag, The Cross, The Stranger.

Sookie's sad when Sam tells her to sit back, and relax, because she's never known how to do that. I like how pro-powers Sam is, I like that he's her advocate for that, even if he doesn't really understand it. Or, as we'll see, the concept of self-control. Adele welcomes the congregation to the meeting; Jason smiles around at them all, completely in love with each one. She starts the procedure.

"Now, our guest tonight is a gentleman who, despite what you might have heard, is one of us. His family was among the first to settle in Bon Temps, and he bravely fought for Louisiana in the War For Southern Independence. Let us welcome one of the original sons of Bon Temps back to the town that he helped build. I give you First Lieutenant William Thomas Compton." The applause is better than you might think; Sam doesn't join in. He watches Bill take the stage; he doesn't take his eyes off him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Stackhouse. If you'll pardon me for a moment..." Bill flourishes The Flag off The Cross and puts it back on its pole as he speaks. Jason pretty much transcends all time and space for a second, as that one gesture manages to encode so much meaning, about men and gods and nations, wars, the unfortunate miscegenation between the two that results in fundamentalism and large-scale acts both religious and secular based less on love than hate and profit, or about the ways in which the ties that bind us and the shared ground beneath our feet will always be stronger than the forces that try to pull us apart, that no matter who we marry or whether or not we're immortal at least we're all Americans, and isn't that the point, or does that truth hide something deeper within it, like a Cross below a Flag, or else he's fucked up on drugs. Everybody else gasps, and all the charming from last week just drains out of old Bill. I hate smug. I hate Smarmy Bill more than anything besides Zach Braff. "As a patriot of this great nation, I wouldn't dream of putting myself before Old

Glory." Sookie's impressed; their entire breakup was based on an allergy flareup, and here he is trying to administer the meds.

-- Page 13 --

He smiles nervously as he takes the pulpit (Lectern? Ambo? Ambo is the best word ever): "As you can see, I did not burst into flames. We vampires are not minions of the Devil. We can stand before a cross, or a Bible, or in a church, just as readily as any other creature of God." In a sufficiently large world, he's saying, you understand that everything that exists, exists with the consent of its Creator. Vampires are creatures of God by virtue of the fact that they are natural beings, because all we have is nature. And if you can stop sneezing long enough to notice that, you can be a part of the world too; you can drive the Ferrari if you're brave enough to admit that it exists.

"I am honored to stand before you tonight. Vampires have traditionally been very private, perhaps to our detriment. But I believe, if we reach out to one another, that we can coexist, and even thrive together." This last comment directed right at Sookie, all intense and vampirical, like "I'll thrive all over your face." Bill served in the 28th Louisiana Infantry, formed in Monroe in 1862 under Colonel Snoozefest Boringfuck, and it was in the war that Bill and his fellow soldiers learned the value of human life, "and the ease with which it can be extinguished."

Bud's all, "That son of buck's been killing since the 1860s, why stop now?" But Andy points at Pamie's Friend & Modern-Day Keanu Reeves Todd Lowe: "That don't prove anything. My cousin Terry killed twenty Iraqis in Fallujah. You saying we should lock him up?" Bud responds that Terry should be locked up regardless, and Andy's hilarious face is like, "Huh? ...Well, probably, yeah."

Bill's explaining how back in the day, soldiers were uneducated and didn't understand the political and ideological conflicts that lead to them getting shot in the head and dying before they get the chance to live a completely life. Glad it's not like that anymore. Arlene's kid remarks on his dead-guy pallor and she shushes him: "No darlin', we're white. He's *dead*." Rene laughs at that. It's so awesome to be full-on white, surrounded by other white people, and then talk about how fucking white you are. I don't know if you know about it, but white people do that constantly. They're called board meetings.

Zoom in on Jason, the blood beating in his veins and his temples, the V in him, changing him, putting in the action. It's as though Bill is speaking directly to him, explaining that going to war what not a choice for them, because it's a choice for nobody: when the war starts, you are called to action. When the war starts, Jason, you have to be ready. You have a calling to fulfill. You have a destiny, it has been handed down to you, from above: drink of us as we drink of you, and you will be sacrificed, and you will become one with all nature, without time or space or the need for any symbolic meaning beyond the simple and profound experience of existence itself. (Starbuck! I'm not kidding!) You are a meaningless object imbued with rich symbolic significance; you are a bucket of blood in a shapely sausage casing; you are prey. Your body is your enemy, your body is your weapon, your body is your currency, your body is your darling, your body is a world that's getting bigger, your body is a world you watch from outside and never inhabit, your body is a meaningless object without intrinsic significance, your body is part of all nature because all we have is nature. You are a creature and a child of God.

"God forbid should any of our men become wounded or injured. Often the only recourse for a serious injury was amputation..." The rednecks pull out a garlic press; the cute blonde one presses the shit out of some garlic, like *viciously and in Bill's direction*, which is hilarious because like, in what drawer of the kitchenette in your trailer home do you keep your garlic press, sir? Sookie watches, unimpressed: she is them. She shares their allergies, and she hurt his feelings on purpose, because she got scared and for no other reason. And all her self-righteous platitudes and judgy-judge and open-mindedness went out the window the second she saw him in a certain light, and realized her world wasn't big enough to contain his every angle. Which is what he spent four episodes testing her on: first you check if they can hang with your friends, then you take them to club and see how they do, and then you make a cop piss himself in front of them. We have all done these things.

As Bill drones on and on about the totally boring shit these people want to hear about, answering such questions as "Did amputation exist" and "Was there weather back then," Hoyt is being cute as hell in the location of the kitchen, cleaning out the fridge and happening on a bottle of TruBlood. He stares at it, fascinated, and then slowly reaches for it, smiling to himself and looking around all shifty before unscrewing the cap and taking a quick sniff. He nearly giggles as he's replacing it on the shelf. I have a fear that Hoyt is going to have a really bad day, some point soon. He's too awesome to survive this show.

Some Colonel Sanders lookin' dude asks about a particular Glorious Dead from whom he Descends, and yes, Bill did happen to know that guy, and here's a totally pointless story about that, because Bill knows as well as you and I and Adele do that at some point in the last five episodes this went from being a historical curiosity to a civil necessity, that Bill needs to be formally introduced to the town where he's making his home, that he must perform perfectly in front of them, that he must manipulate and hypnotize them into not lynching him in the daylight, that the great leap forward that humanity's still trying to accomplish even after two years has come to Bon Temps. That it's no longer a choice: when it starts, you are called to action. When the world gets bigger you have to be ready.

Bill flashes back to a battle about twenty miles north, in which "the Federals" outnumbered the good guys five-to-one, and had better guns, and everybody was dying. And this kid was lying injured, out in the field, under the sun, fourteen or younger, calling to him and this guy's Glorious Dead Ancestor, all day long. This was back before Bill's short-bus haircut, back when he was totally hot and had really great hair. So anyway, Bill thought about how probably he should shoot the kid, to put him out of his misery, but Ancestor Tolliver told him that was murder, not war. It wasn't that the kid was beyond help so much as the fact that they couldn't get to him, across that open space, and bring him back to their location. Tolliver looked across that field and saw The Boy; he got a message from God to get him. Bill pled with him not to do it, specifically offering, note, what would hold him personally back, the thing he loves and misses most, his family. But the thing that animated Bill is not what animated Tolliver, and Tolliver headed out to do his duty to God and the boy. He died instantly, of course, just as he reached the kid, and blood went everywhere.

"And then, after a while, the boy started screaming again." The boy is Jason. Lost in the wilderness and bullshit that keeps us apart, under the sunny sky. Screaming, alone. It's not that he's beyond help so much as the fact that they won't be able to get to him, across that

open space, when it's time; that they won't be able to get him home in one piece, once he starts wandering. Or probably he's just all fucked up on drugs.

"What happened to the boy?" Maxine asks, in the silence. She's a mother. The boy lived. She is moved, and across the aisle Terry Bellefleur starts to freak out a little bit, because war is like a gin and tonic: pretty much the same no matter where you drink it. The rednecks are unimpressed by this boring story about the boy, but everybody else is all over Bill's jock at this point. Mayor Norris hobbles up and hands Bill an old tintype from the archives that says *Mr. W.T. Compton and family* on the back. The question Mayor Norris wants to ask is whether this is a picture of Bill, because if so, that is extremely fucked up because Bill is standing right there. Bill's voice cracks. "This... This is a remarkable photograph. I remember the day we gathered to have this taken." Sookie's touched by the depth of feeling he's hiding. She can't hear his thoughts but she knows him better than anybody in this room; she probably knows his face better than any other face because of all the skills she's had to use with him, it follows, for the first time.

"When was the last time you were with them?" Maxine asks. Everyone but Sam is moved by the idea that not everybody made it, through time; that he's the last man standing. "When I went to war in 1862. I... My human life ended before I had a chance to come back home." Rene asks if he became a... *(is this a situation where you use a euphemism or is there some kind of politically correct hyphenate or is it even offensive or has he reclaimed the word or is it just a word, a meaningless utterance imbued with meaning through connotation and context, and if I offend him will they make me leave, because this is totally interesting, okay fuck it)* "...A vampire after that, right? Couldn't you go back to your family then?" The sadness in his eyes is bottomless; he puts a handkerchief to his eyes so that they won't see him crying, because if they see him crying their allergies will kick in: "No. No, that wouldn't have been possible." Maxine and everybody cry along with him; Sookie looks about ready to do him right there in church. "This is not a subject I'm very comfortable speaking about. But thank you for the photograph, Mayor. Brings back many memories for me." He smiles; Sookie nearly weeps for him. He palms the handkerchief, hiding the tears. They are made of blood.

-- Page 16 --

Adele says goodbye to everybody, and Terry Bellefleur throws his arms around Bill without prelude. "They don't understand, man. None of them will ever understand." There are little Dixie flags on all the tables; somebody's playing it on the piano. Normally that would be overkill, production-wise, but honestly that's what this event is all about. Bill realizes what's going on with Terry, and holds him for a moment. The Brother. Maxine and Hoyt, whose entire face lights up at this point whenever he's around Bill, take a photograph with him (Bill is happy to disprove the myth about mirrors and pictures); Bill is more human in this moment than I've ever seen him, so of course effin' Sookie walks up with Sam Merlotte in tow. She doesn't take her eyes off Bill's the entire scene; she introduces them and Bill's voice is gentle. "Yes. You're Sookie's employer." Sam nods, but notes that they're off-duty right now. "No," Bill says all nerdy, "Legally you still are." Sam is like, "Um okay weirdo," because that was hilarious and dorky. Frankly, Bill should be with Sookie for the free Not Acting Totally Weird lessons alone.

Sam tosses a few zingers and vague threats Bill's way about how like Bill may think he's got everybody fooled but not Sam Merlotte no sir, he will keep hating on Bill until they dig up every bone he ever buried, and Bill can go fuck himself and vampires suck and whatever. Sam finally forces her eyes away from Bill's by literally sticking his giant beautiful face in

her face: "We're gonna grab a cup of coffee before we call it a night." Bill's like, "Coffee. Sounds delightful." But what he means is, "I hope that it contains poison and that you die when you drink the coffee with poison in it, because you suck and vampires rule." Sookie is tired of all their shit and takes off, hugging Adele and smiling at Bill. "He seems nice," Bill says with nearly zero discernable emotion, and Adele is about half dotty and half put out by the boy drama so she just goes, like, "Ungh?"

The ass cheeks of Randi Sue, how they do sway, like a flag fluttering in the wind. Randi Sue is maybe the grossest person ever on this show, besides Maudette Pickens and I guess the Coroner's fangbanger Assistant. Hoyt is all over it, and full of bravado and gender performance. "Man, this place is crawling with hot chicks and we're just sitting here like our balls are stuck together!" Hello to the imagery, which is actually kind of confusing. Rene points out that his chère, such as she is, works at the very establishment in which they are sitting, and Jason casually unsnaps his entire shirt and starts giving the table a massage, as if to say he gets laid so constantly and consistently that he's having sex *right now*, as we speak. Hoyt floats the idea that they should order some TruBloods, grossing Rene out, but cops to being totally fascinated by Bill and wanting to try some things. "I go to the dog races, you see me eating Alpo?" Fair point, rubbernecker. Hoyt stands by it, though: "Well, I just thought he was pretty cool, was all."

-- Page 17 --

Jason looks at Tara, working behind the bar, and she turns into an actual Tarot card, pouring water into the river, day-glo green leaves plaited into her hair and a manic grin plastered on her goddess's face. The Beloved, the Star. He stands up to get the next pitcher, still completely high and weird and giggly: "Yup, I'll get it. I love you guys." Hoyt's pleased, then does a double-take. I wish Jason were like this all the time but I don't want him to get stuck here either. I think I might love Jason the most, you guys. That's really weird. I know that I identify with and love his storyline the most, because it's about all the shit I'm coincidentally into, such as hard drugs and filthy sex, but also: the true things that come up when you are intoxicated, the increased Jason-ness of Jason, is wonderful. He wants to make you happy, and he almost has a plan about how to do that, like... Jason Stackhouse would fuck the entire world if he could, like as a favor, to make us smile. And that is a beautiful thing. He's like the Fucker in the Rye, in that respect. When I was saying that he brought Dawn flowers and a boner it was kind of a joke, but I don't think that anymore. I think he was actually bringing her flowers and his dick, and that was his apology. I mean, he's dumb as hell but he is good, and I really just think good is more important than smart. I think smart is way overrated most of the time.

When he touches Tara's arm, he jumps. "Whoa! You feel that? Every hair on your arm is shooting sparks into my hand!" The only reason Jason wants to fuck the world is that he can't handle the tragedy of acknowledging that nobody ever really knows anybody else; that his sister's the only person that can truly come into your body and be one with you, on the other side of the skin; inside his skin, where he is trapped. Where he is lonely, and alone, forever. It's not your skin he wants, but the sparks on the other side of it, and sex is the closest and the furthest thing from this. It's why he got carried away with Maudette, why it gets rough sometimes: spread yourself as thin across the body of a person as you want, you're still not getting in there. You still can't touch the sparks. And to a beast like him, or Sam, that's got to be the saddest thing, because it's not like he can intellectualize it, or get inside people that way, with a brain. "You know those electric fences they use to pen horses? It feels like I just pissed on one!"

Tara's like "Jesus H! Seriously?" Jason swears he's not high, immediately admits that he's super fucking high on drugs, but that doesn't have anything to do with whether his feelings are legitimate or real. "For the first time, I can see clear. All these years, I was blinded by the bullshit that keeps people apart. It's you, Tara. It's been you all along." She's like, um, I have known you since I was six. WTF are you talking about? How cruel can you possibly be, to tell me this now? When does the sad part come? How are you going to disappoint me this time? How does my world get bigger this time? Why take off the training wheels, when all I wanted was for you to stay inaccessible?

-- Page 18 --

"It's taken me all this time to admit it. Come here," he says, leaning in. She grins easily, conspiratorially, like she's known him since she was six. "This bar might be filled with beautiful women, but you're the one who took care of me when I needed it. You showed me love, Tara. And that's the most beautiful thing of all." Oh, Jason. His empty eyes are like an overbred hound, glassy and unfocused and very, very excited and pleased about nothing in particular. It's so fucked up when he does that, it freaks me out every time. And he's doing it *all the time*. Tara tells him to come back when he's sober, and they can discuss it for real. He gets all palm to palm is holy palmer's kiss on her, folding his fingers through hers, breathing softly, adoring her with those empty, borderline-retarded eyes. She's like, "For fucking real?" He kisses her fingers. "Just give me a chance, I'll prove it to you. Everything I'm feeling..." He breathes, deep. His immune system is gone. "...I want to feel it with you. One chance. That's all I'm asking." Her mouth forms the beginnings of words but she doesn't successfully complete the mission; she pulls her fingers out from his and wanders away, shell-shocked.

Also romantic: eating pie with Sam Merlotte at a restaurant, after coffee. She offers him the last bite, and he cuts it in half. He starts in about her powers again, all, "Guess you saw this comin'," and "Do you ever listen to my thoughts like I keep telling you to do?" She admits that she's done it. "...To be honest, it's a little weird. You don't think the way others do. Most people, it's whole sentences or images. With you, sometimes there's words? But other times, I just get these sounds, like, waves of emotions." And sometimes it's just like, "Snausages! Snausages! Snausages! SnausagesSnausagesSnausagesSnausages!"

Sam tries to play it off about how maybe he's just a freak, and she says what's freaky is how mysterious he is, which he finds flattering. "How come nobody knows anything about you? I never hear you talk about where you're from, or your family, or anything." He explains that the people who raised him have little or nothing to do with who he is now, not to mention that he basically raised himself. We call that Raised By Wolves in my circle, because a lot of us grew up that way, but it seems particularly appropriate for this circumstance I think. "Is that why you spend so much time alone?" Sam explains how that's probably more due to his general hatred of people. Sookie laughs that he certainly chose a strange business to buy if he hates people that bad, and he says he was really just looking to meet pretty waitresses. She laughs, adorably: "...Too bad you got yourself a couple of crazy ones in the bargain!"

-- Page 19 --

He gives her a *come on* look, and goes back to commanding her to have more self-esteem. You're not crazy, you're magic! Way better! "There's nothing wrong with you. I can't understand why you'd wanna fix, or change, or ... hide anything. I wouldn't want you any other way..." Sookie looooves that, of course, because it's what everybody should get to

hear sixty reps a day, not just a few in a lifetime. "You're just trying to get on my good side." He asks how he's doing, and she smiles, looking down. They geek out about the pie some more, cutting it into smaller and smaller pieces like some Xeno paradox about infinite regress, and I'm sorry but I just keep thinking that I would not want to lose my virginity to a werewolf. I don't know that Sookie is ready for that jelly.

Arlene brings a hamburger back to the grill and looks at Lafayette tiredly. He asks if there's a problem, and she says it's just some drunk rednecks (Guess who? Good thing this small southern town only has three rednecks, because that's totally realistic.) "What did they say, Arlene?" After five times, she finally answers the question: "He said ... the burger ... might have AIDS." I'm sorry, but that's hilarious. And if Lafayette didn't have V coursing through his veins and in his muscles, making him strong, he ... Well, probably he still wouldn't find it funny, and actually he would throw this exact same party. Never mind. Lafayette cocks his head sideways, like, "Oh yes?" and then takes off his earrings. (My second-favorite thing of all things that people do! Right after whenever somebody bangs their face against a car window because they forget it's rolled up. That is the highest form of comedy to me.) Arlene regrets telling him as he very deliberately removes his apron and takes the plate off the counter, heading toward what I like to call an Opportunity To Educate.

"Excuse me. Who ordered the hamburger ... *with AIDS?*" The other two laugh, because obviously it's the cute blonde one who is going to be receiving the wrath here. The blonde says, all attitude, that he ordered the hamburger deluxe, and sparks fly out of Lafayette's eyeballs as he slowly morphs into [Tracy Jordan](#). "In this restaurant, a hamburger deluxe comes with french fries, lettuce, tomato, mayo... and *AIDS!*" People get a little quieter and watch what happens. The guy makes a very strange argument that I don't quite follow, basically that, as an American citizen, he has a say in who makes his food. What does that mean? You have your choice of restaurants and may exercise it as will, but that's not what you're doing. It's like... Well, it's like bitching about the fact that you can't bitch about a website *on that website*, like your civil rights are being violated, when you have *the entire internet* to say whatever you want. Dumb as shit to a degree that's always confused and frightened me, and I can't even tell if that's where he's going with it because I don't speak stupid that fluently. Lafayette, though, is a bridge-builder.

-- Page 20 --

"Baby, it's too late for that. Faggots been breeding your cows, raising your chickens, even brewing your beer, long before I walked my sexy ass up in this motherfucker. Everything on your goddamn table's got AIDS." I wish every episode were just Lafayette talking, because I never have much to add because he is so wonderful. They sit there, in the midst of all that AIDS, and consider their circumstance. Blondie says another retarded thing about how "You still ain't makin' me eat no AIDS burger," which ... who the fuck is making you do anything? I'm so confused. It's like this whole stop hitting yourself thing that he's doing, like he's playing an elaborate prank on the world, looking for a fight and too dumb to justify it like the rest of us.

But again, Lafayette understands what he means. He picks up the top of the bun and licks off some mayonnaise, slowly and delicately, and proceeds to do the very thing Blondie did not want: forces him to eat some AIDS by slamming the licked bun in his face, going ninja on the two other guys faster than the human eye, and punching Blondie in the face a couple times. "Bitch, you come in my house, you're gonna eat my food *the way I fucking make it!* Do you understand me?" He tosses the plate in Blondie's lap and holds his hand in the air as

though to suggest that, in another time and place, he would be snapping his fingers in your face. It's a gesture that suggests, rather than embodies, like slang for slang or the next generation of a phrase. "Tip your waitress," he says, heading back toward the kitchen. His brother-in-V Jason Stackhouse is having a fucking ball, slapping him five and dancing to his own special giggly music.

Coming out of the restaurant, Sam's ready to take the next step. He's grateful she can't hear all his thoughts, he explains, because then she would know that his tongue was aiming for her throat. That's certainly where it finds itself at this time. She kisses him back, and he starts getting way into it, and she finally takes a second to breathe. She's like, "We are going too fast, we are not going too fast, we are should not be kissing, we should be kissing, I need everything to stop."

"Trust me, I want to. It's just kind of... too much right now, and a little too soon since..." He takes a second asking sweetly what she means, and then jumping back in a rage. "Goddamn it, Sookie!" She apologizes, because she's kind of new to dating because she never met any monsters until lately, and he frets about how taking her to the DGD meeting was the killing blow. "It's not him. Just stop it. I just can't go jumping from kissing one man to the next so quickly..." Sam starts shaking and thinks about peeing on her, all, "YOU KISSED HIM?" Not your business. "What else did you do?" *Really* not your business. "Is this a contest for you? Whatever he did, you have to top it?" Sam tells her that's not fair, but as usual she's twice as good at conversation as anybody besides Tara: "You know what's unfair, is you waiting 'til someone else shows an interest before you decide to kiss me." He whines that she has no future with a vampire, and she rocks: "They don't die! I've got nothing but a future with one." Advantage Stackhouse!

-- Page 21 --

"Aw, just like Dawn had a future? Like Maudette Pickens had a future?" Dawn, fucking her way towards death, across the wilderness; Maudette fucking in the garbage. She points out that Bill didn't kill those ladies, but that's not the point he's making. As we all know, women who enjoy sex with vampires deserve death, and secretly want it. He backs her up, against the car, voice harsh and breath hot. "There's nothing that I will not do to keep that thing from hurting you. They're not like us. They could turn on you." Sookie, getting scared, points out that "people" can, too: "You're doing pretty good right now." That's what it looks like, now, from this angle, with the pieces missing. I don't know the whole story, and neither does Sookie. These are the parts of Sam we don't know yet, this is what it looks like across the wilderness from me to you: alien, angry, frightening, inhuman, irrational. He realizes he's being a creep/freak but doesn't apologizes, just offers to take her home and end the date. She shoves past him back into the restaurant to call a cab, and the anger rises up again, throwing sparks.

Randi Sue ... ugh, she's just so fucking tragic and unpleasant. Anyway, she dances drunkenly, and Hoyt wanders up grinning and lost, doing a weird little dance-like movement that involves pretending to ride a horse with a hat on, and she's like, "Watcha doin', baby?" I'm curious about that as well, to be frank. "You know, keeping it real. Partyin'." White people actually *are* kind of an elaborate prank, aren't they? Randi Sue is celebrating her divorce, which is now final; her high-five is so vigorous that it hurts his hand. Aww, Hoyt! I will high-five you tenderly! It won't ever hurt! He gives her this great look, like, "You are so fucking wasted, awesome," and she says her ex was a jerk. "He shot my car," she says, as though that explains it all. It ... really does, though.

She backs her nasty self into his crotch and, across the bar, Jason Stackhouse is all fucked up on drugs; he and Rene watch Randi's antics together, amazed at how totally grody she is. "It's like watching Animal Planet, yeah? Any second, she gonna bite his head off, I swear." Jason believes him for a second, because here, in this place right now, all anybody's thinking about is sex, sex, sex. Love, love, love. Two things held apart like magnets until today, when the world got big enough to contain them both. It's like watching Animal Planet; it's always been like watching Animal Planet. Jason watching Jason fuck the animal planet. But today he climbed through the glass; he's on safari, for the first time: part of all nature, because nature is all we have. Or probably he's still fucked up on drugs. Hoyt comes back to them eventually, across the wilderness and back to his people: he didn't feel it. "That spark," he didn't feel it with Randi Sue. He thought he did, but that was a tiny little love bite from one of her pubic lice. They drink blood.

-- Page 22 --

Tara brings Hoyt his TruBlood, no refunds, warmed to the usual 98.6, and giggles at how gross the next few minutes of his life are going to be. She glances down at Jason, who is still not home even though the lights are on, and walks away. Hoyt is totally grossed out by his TruBlood, obviously, and Rene's like, "It tastes. Like. Blood. That is the point." Hoyt whines that he thought it would be awesomer. "I thought it was supposed to be some sort of life force, or something..." And Jason, dancing to the rhythms of the spheres, jumpy and wild and beautiful, explains sagely while staring into space: "Aw, TruBlood don't do nothing. The real life force is V." Rene explains V to Hoyt, and Jason dances himself into a flirty little chair-dancing frenzy: "All our blood belongs to the universe. They take some from us, we take a little from them." Rene prefers to say no to drugs. Drugs and doilies: *non, merci*. Jason doesn't drop it, though: "It might give you the will to seal the deal with that girl," he says, raising and cocking his finger-guns, "Only thing holding you back is you." Hoyt sends some finger-guns back Jason's way, and they all toast to how Hoyt is just being a pussy because clearly Randi Sue is a whore. He kisses the bottom of his TruBlood bottle as a tribute to her, sending the toast her way, and she's full-on creeped out. Randi Sue, you have no fucking room to talk. They all laugh anyway.

Bill stood across the field from the old Compton place, and saw his family on the porch, waiting for him to come home. Waiting for him to cross back over that last bit of wilderness, to welcome him in again. His son spotted him, in the darkness, and when his mother asked what he saw, the boy said just one word. "Papa."

He is his own descendent, basically, because he never dies, which is why the second we get vampires we really need to look at the estate tax, and this is and was his house, I think: Not *ancestral*, but *literal*. He is the Glorious Dead. This wasn't about reclaiming his roots, it's about reclaiming the parts of himself that are still human, and seeing if the ghosts are gone. Sad.

Bud and Andy surprise him, standing there, remembering his family and a remarkable photograph; he invites them in immediately. Into his home. Inside, he stokes the fire even though it's totally hot outside and he himself is room temperature, so that when he leaves to get Andy Bellefleur a Fresca, which sounds so good right now I could cry, they can look at the sharp and dangerous looking implement near the hearth, which he informs them is not a weapon but an olde-tyme device for toasting bread. They discuss Maudette and Dawn, neither whom he knew, and Bud asks if he knew that they'd both had sex with vampires at some point. "I was not. But it's more common than you would think," he says, and they are

weirded out, because he fully intended to weird them out, because he's serious about hating cops.

-- Page 23 --

They start pushing again and he asks them straight up if the bodies were exsanguinated when they were discovered. Andy refuses to tell him, just on dickish principle, and he explains, licking his lips and going into that darker voice, that horny, breathing, hungry voice: "Because a fresh corpse... full of blood? Detective, that's something no vampire could resist. I dare say, not even I." Andy's like, "Glad you weren't there, then," and Bill points out it's not just him: "A vampire would have drained those girls of every last drop." He drops the voice and asks Andy how he's liking his Fresca, and apologizes for the temperature: he doesn't own a refrigerator. Plus, you know, the roaring fire on a hot summer night probably isn't helping. Outside, after leaving, Bud tells Andy to forget his pen, because they're not going back for it. And inside, Bill watches them go before taking off his jacket so he can have some memories.

Everything about this flashback is like a neon sign: *You Are In A Gothic Fairytale Right Now*: the mysterious house in the woods, the lonely magical widow alone in her house, the starving traveler. I love how completely the atmosphere is created, for this it's like a whole other show for a bit. So Old Human Bill knocks on the door for a while, because he's been walking away from the war for two weeks and now he's hungry and thirsty and tired and dying, and finally he cuts the rope that serves as a chain lock and lets himself in; the woman of the house holds a gun to his head and tells him not to move.

Of course, later he's drinking thirstily as Lorena cooks him food after food, including toast from the scary implement. They talk about how his company disbanded immediately, and how nobody knows that the war's over because there is no Anderson Cooper yet in this horrible primordial America. The past is so, so awful. Based on how much awesomer it is right now compared to any other time ever, I'm thinking the future is going to fucking rock. Anyway, his hair still looks totally cute, which is score one for the past, but still a billion for right now because there's nothing keeping him from having cute hair in all timelines. He tries to tell her some lie about how her husband probably stopped writing her letters because he's so busy buying her a pony or something, and she's like: "I'm totally cool with being a widow, actually. Oh, and let's fuck." Well, first she wipes all the blood off his face, and is like totally obsessed with it, and he kind of enjoys the feeling of skin against his skin and the cool water wiping away the blood and grime, and that's when she tries to fuck him. He's all, "Um, my wife and kids are my favorite thing in the whole world, actually, and I'd feel creepy if I fucked you and saw them right afterward, so chill." Chill she does not.

-- Page 24 --

Lorena tells Bill to stop judging her, and he's like, "That's just how my face looks! I am nonjudgmental!" She doesn't care, and just tries to climb him some more, so he thanks her for her hospitality and tries to leave, but then it turns out that she is a vampire. And then it turns out that he is dead.

Later Lorena's watching him be almost entirely dead in her bed, wearing a corset, suddenly clean and regal and scary. She smiles down at him as his eyelids flutter open, and he's totally horrified because she has decorated her room in Late Guy, which she explains: "They all presented themselves as gentlemen. You can blame the war if you like. They proved to be

no more than savages once I let them into my home. They deserve no better." He's like, "So I'm totally dead, right?" And she's like, no, I'm way sicker than that. She straddles him with about ten acres of petticoats getting tossed all over the place, and explains she's been waiting a long time for a man like Bill, with totally cute hair and no interest in boning her. I see women every day sabotaging themselves in just this way: find the one inaccessible guy, and that's the one you suck all the blood out of and turn into a creature of the night. Such a cliché. She tells him it's going to be awesome because his wife and children are still around and all he has to do is drink her creepy blood, but he's kind of resisting that because as she says it, she's totally slitting her own throat open. Damn, girl.

Lorena drips blood all over Bill's face -- Which she just cleaned all the blood off of! Argh! -- and finally that little tongue comes peeping out. Man, it's always the tongue. If Jason's penis is its own separate character at this point, how about Bill's goddamn tongue? Finally he gets after it, and she holds him to her neck, moaning as he sucks harder and harder, getting stronger. And her idea of dirty talk is really unnerving. "Take me in you. Feel me in you. We are together William, forever. You are mine..." Lorena is all about the postmodern irony of penetrating the penetrator while he's penetrating you and whatever. Sex, Sex, Sex; Love, Love, Love. Bill stares at his family on the porch, sees his son catch a glimpse of him in the night, and Lorena gloats behind him.

"Look. You know you can never enter. Do you wish to see them grow old? Grow feeble and die, while you remain the same year after year? They are as good as dead. If they are found harboring a vampire... I've brought you here, and now it's time for us to go." He stands there, weeping blood, and doesn't move; she draws her finger across the air above his shoulder, scratching him lightly, reminding him of the rules now. "Come." He moans, but follows, because he must. And then back in our time, he goes to town on the fireplace; sparks fly out. He really doesn't react well to authority, does he?

-- Page 25 --

Tara brings the night's garbage out behind Merlotte's and hears a sound just around the corner: it's Jason, all hopped up on V, fucking Randi Sue with a giant grin on his face. Without stopping, he looks up at Tara's voice and lights up all over. "Hey, Tara! This is Randi Sue. Come join us. It's beautiful!" And it is. The world is sufficiently big that nobody holds anything against anybody else, because we are one. The sparks in the magnolia and the sparks just across Randi Sue's skin, you can see them: they are the same. What need is there to feel alone ever again, to try to fuck your way across the line, when you've discovered the secret of the universe is that you're already across the line. And they are in you, and you two are only parts of the universe meeting in a kiss, and saying in your pleasure, "I remember you. Welcome home."

"Fuck you, Stackhouse," Tara says, and opens the bag of garbage, emptying it on them even as he's continuing to fuck away. She doesn't mean it like he wishes. The garbage should smell bad: wrappers and that nasty beer water and food scraped from plates, mixed together over the course of the night, vegetables already wilting, meat beginning to break down, preparing to rot. It should smell bad; we have evolved with a sense of smell to tell us that some foods are dangerous, unpleasant smelling. It's part of the body's immune system, to tell us when parts of the world don't belong inside us, but outside us. You know the worst part about kids? The part where they play with their shit the first time, because they don't know how to interpret the smell; they can't filter it out from the constant onslaught of sights and sounds and other situations, so it gets lost. There's all kinds of

examples of this kind of overload, and it's fine in context. But you have to be able to turn it off. This is HoHos to a diabetic: You shouldn't fuck in a pile of trash. That's something crazy people do.

When everything is beautiful, when everything's illuminated, you're not fucking in trash, you're touching God. Except of the three people in this scene, there's only one person who is seeing that; he picks it up in his hands, moaning and laughing while he fucks Randi Sue. He rubs it across her back. Everything is beautiful and significant, even the trash in Randi Sue's hair, even the smell of it on his hands and their skin; even as she's screaming at him not to stop. Dead matter against living skin: the secret is that there's no division at all, only love. That is a beautiful thing. In the blood there is life force, and there is truth. All blood is True Blood. This is the Ferrari and it always has been; he's only now learning to drive it, and learning where it takes you. Living skin, dead matter, separated by bullshit you can only see in context; all this matter and the sparks inside it are the point: they matter. They are significant and alive, whole in themselves, full of life and beauty. It's just nature, and nature's all we have.

-- Page 26 --

Finally and for the first time Jason Stackhouse understands what sex really is: the secret, the way they are getting inside you the same time you're inside them, the way the sparks fly up and meet and burn. Eden, the home we're all looking for: it's right here, all around you, in the bodies and the garbage, in the beauty of knowing that it's all love, and that you're an essential part of it. Finally and for the first time Jason Stackhouse feels loved, and less alone inside his skin. He is a child of God.

He is all fucked up on drugs.

Sookie pulls up to her house in a cab and goes inside, taking off her sandals on the porch before entering on bare feet. Her feet slip as she reaches for the light switch, and Tina gives a plaintive yowl as Sookie looks down, sees the puddle she's standing in, and follows the blood to its source: Adele Stackhouse's body.

The world gets bigger.

## REVERSE COWGIRL

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 6 | Aired on 10.12.2008

*Cold Ground* - That funeral-as-aphrodisiac thing gets everybody's blood pumping. One way or another.

After ruining their date, Sam heads over to Sookie's house and finds Bill comforting her in the aftermath of discovering Adele's body. Andy Bellefleur, of course, assumes that it's somehow Jason's fault because that is his whole personality. Too much Sam/Sookie weirdness leads to Sam getting aggressive with Bill, finally, and they sniff each other and growl and do all the things guys do.

At the wake, Jason gets all v-juiced crazy and attacks Sookie, so she takes a valium from Lafayette and manages to sleep through her own murder. Which doesn't go as planned, although we get confirmation that Bill can tell when she's in trouble -- and can't do anything about it if it's daytime. Oh, and Jason is a total junkie for V, and throws Andy Bellefleur about six feet. So it's a 50/50.

The funeral goes about as well as you might think, between Jason inviting their evil uncle, Tara's drunk bitch mother showing up with some kind of exorcism pyramid scheme, and Sookie screaming at the whole town of Bon Temps, and their respective brain waves, to shut the fuck up.

Tara and Sam hook up again, slightly more for real this time, but Tara freaks out because Randi Sue and Jason are fucking next door. Because yes, he's back on V even though he smacked his sister around; what Tara doesn't know is that Jason's crying his way through it, because he is completely fucked up as usual.

Sookie takes about half the episode to cry and eat a pecan pie. Then she puts on a huge billowy white Gothic gown and goes flitting through a graveyard, and Bill throws the doors of his haunted mansion open and then sweeps her into his arms, and it's totally freaking dumb to the point of being awesome.

In other news: Tara forgives her mother, I guess; Anna Paquin has breasts; Sookie becomes a fangbanger. Man I thought losing your virginity to a werewolf would be bad but this was something else. Next week: Lizzy Caplan!

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Sookie stares down at Adele's giant pool of blood on the kitchen floor, while Tina the cat is content to lick at it, like animals do. She falls down on her knees, shrinking back and gasping as it touches her. She stares, almost sick, and Bill arrives, hurling her to her feet. She stares at him, terrified, and uncomprehending; he calls her back to herself. "Sookie. It's me. Sookie. Sookie, it's me." She finally recognizes him, in the field of her twenty-yard stare, and falls into his arms.

Someone else comes onto the porch and Bill stares, listening, while Sookie cries in his arms. When the door squeaks, out come the fangs, and before you know it he's got Sam against the doorframe by the throat. Sam shouts at him and Bill demands to know what he's doing there. "I was making sure that Sookie got home safe. The door was open..." He asks what

Bill's doing there, and Sookie tells Bill to drop him. Bill's fangs disappear and Sam sees her clearly for the first time, in a child's dress, covered in blood. He's shaking, with spit on his lips. "What happened?"

Later, Sam puts a blanket around her shoulders while Detective Bellefleur and Sheriff Dearborn investigate the scene; Mike and Neil the Kreepy Koroners are in there too. Sam tells her to get some rest, but she can't; she can hear it all. The partial prints on the sink that lead nowhere; Bud's nausea at the blood on his boots, his worries about his family; Andy sternly telling himself to pull it the fuck together if he's ever going to get any respect. Mike marvels at the wounds:...*Cut her up real good must be thirty stabs throat's wide open holy hell we got ourselves a serial killer here.* Andy mourns for Adele (...*Poor woman stuck raising these bad-shit crazy Stackhouse kids didn't deserve this I...*) Sam calls her back to herself. "Sookie?" She stares at him, in the sudden and temporary silence. "Maybe I could use a little air," she says matter-of-factly; he stares at her helplessly as she stands.

On the porch, she pulls the blanket tight around her. It belonged to her Gran. This house, the dress she mended, the food she made, the cat she fed, the love she gave them. It all belonged to Gran. Sookie most of all. The cracks in the china and the place where she made Jason fix the front stoop when it was sagging last summer. Lavender and basil and thyme in the garden. This house smells like her. The cracks in the foundation, the sound it makes in the night, the fourth step on your way up groaning in the night; Gran's eyes on you everywhere, knowing when you were bad and when you were good. She's dead, but the house still smells like her and the dishes are where she likes them, and even on the porch she's everywhere, her arms are still around you.

-- Page 2 --

She's all around you; absence is the opposite of presence and she has not been edited out, deleted, so what the fuck was that in the kitchen. Circus blood and one singular absence: her heartbeat in your mind, like a voice in your head all the time saying *That's my Sookie, beautiful granddaughter, beloved of God, most favorite daughter, keeping you safe all through the night*: that's gone. It was a lifeline and it loomed large, all the time: those constant words of love and protection and hope and pride and home. It was an anchor; it was the sound and the feeling and the very book of love and that voice, now, is silent. The space it left fills up with everybody else. This house smells like her. The dishes are where she likes them.

Sam stares down at Sookie, staring at the empty world with blood on her knees. "I never should have left you alone." But that wasn't Sam. It's not Sam's fault she's alone. "I lost my temper and I shouldn't have..." Oh, right. That. The date that went wrong. "Do you think you could apologize to me some other time?" He takes her hand, begging to help, to be of service. To apologize with deeds, not words, the way he does best. To find the space Gran left, still warm, and climb inside; to put his arms around her and protect her all through the night. (...*Hold you make it better I'm the one I'm so sorry sorrowful soft skin...*) Sookie pulls her hand back and tells him to cut it out; he is embarrassed.

They listen to the radio chatter from the police car. There was something else, a kind of silence. What was it? Before Sam rubbing himself against the cracks of the foundation like a dog after its fatty beef, before Andy and Bud and Mike and Neil, before thirty stabs, before the prints on the sink. Before all the words, when it was just silence. Listening to the rushing sound of fear and the ringing in her ears, there was something, some relief, a feeling she

remembers, what was it? What was it blocked out the sound of death? That helped. Would that help? What was it, that sound? Ah. "What happened to Bill?"

Sam's face falls further but he knows it's right. It is what a man would do. He heads off to look for Bill and Sookie doesn't look up; she thanks the space where he was standing.

Sam enters the bedroom and stares at Bill, gruffly telling him to go find Sookie. Bill asks if he's got anything to add and Sam tells him, hackles up, to stay away from her. They recognize each other. "You know, Sookie doesn't take kindly to people making decisions for her." Sam begins to circle him, threateningly: "You don't need to tell me who Sookie is. I know who she is. I've known a long time." Bill points out that this, tonight, is neither time nor place for Sam to mark his territory. "There's a woman lying dead downstairs. She wouldn't be there if it weren't for you." He leans in, baring his teeth: "If anything happens to Sookie, I promise I'll be sharpening a stake with your name on it." Bill doesn't look away, so Sam leaves. And when he's gone, Bill notes the screen of a window, and the vertical slit in it. He was already sure it wasn't a vampire, but that proves it.

-- Page 3 --

Coroner Mike is excited: "Looks like she put up a hell of a fight. See those defensive cuts on her hand? Straight to the bone?" Neil agrees that it's "hardcore"; there's nothing dark or deep or meaningful about being the coroner's apprentice. It turns out it's just a job. Bodies don't tell you anything real, don't answer any questions or reveal any mysteries. The only mystery our bodies contain was gone before he got there.

"Psycho son of a bitch, going after her all the way that way. Just about the sickest thing I've ever seen," Andy grits, but Bud's seen worse: "There was a murder about six years ago. Lady snapped, blew her husband's head off while he was watching the game. Big chunks of brain all over the TV." Andy asks him why she did it, and Bud looks at him: "Guess she wanted to watch something else. How the hell would I know, Andy? People don't murder because they're right in the head." Andy brings up Jason Stackhouse again, and Bud's like, "This is his grandmother." Andy, obsessed as ever with Jason and Jason's body, is convinced he's enough of a "little perv" that he could do it. He's so wrong. "Adele did bring the fang into a church. Sure that ruffled more than a few feathers. If he didn't do it himself," says Bud. Obsessed as ever with vampires, the strangeness of them, the life and death and sex around them. He's wrong too. Andy protests that "Vampire Bill" told them about the pool of blood, how it wouldn't be there if a vampire were close, and Bud laughs angrily at him. "Vampire Bill? You're on a first-name basis with that bloodsucker now? These things are crafty, they've been killing long enough to know how to cover their tracks..." Bill enters, interrupting. "Am I interrupting?"

Andy: "Whoa." He starts to tell Bill to vacate the crime scene, but Bud waves him off. "I suspect Vampire Bill's been around a dead body or two before. Isn't that right, sir?" Bill doesn't look away, so Bud changes his tone. "Friend of yours, wasn't she?" Bill takes too long to answer, actually considering the question before realizing she was. That made me sad. He didn't even know; his reeducation hadn't even progressed far enough for him to know Adele was his friend; technically Adele Stackhouse was his *best* friend. Maybe his *only* friend, in the world, and now she's gone. Bud takes off his hat for that.

"Well, we got a couple more questions for you. Do you mind?" Of course not. In the parlor, Andy asks if he was there when Sookie found the body, but that's not exactly true. He

arrives the second after. "Kind of late to be making house calls," Bud says, and then reminds himself that vamps don't sleep. "They sleep," Andy corrects him spicily, "Just not at night." Bud asks Bill if he makes a "habit" of visiting Sookie in the middle of the night, managing to imply he's not only a serial killer but a sex maniac besides, and Bill patiently explains that they had "certain personal matters to discuss." Specifically to the effect that her plan to make him jealous worked so incredibly well that neither of them knows that's what she was doing.

-- Page 4 --

"When I heard her car in the drive, I came across the cemetery." Andy's impressed at that, and Bill reminds him that "heightened senses" are part of the whole bloodsucking experience. Andy nods and asks if he heard anything else, like maybe Jason Stackhouse's pickup truck, but he didn't. The whole Andy/Jason thing is kind of at an all-time level of ridiculousness here. I'm so sure he killed his grandmother, Andy. But I like how blind and hateful Andy and Bud both manage to be, trying as hard to be right as they are to prove the other one wrong, because I like where it puts Andy: on Bill's side, just like Bud's on Jason's side. As always, the minotaur's the only one knows the way out and he's the first one we go after.

"Lot of folks would not be too keen on a vampire moving in the next door," Bud says, speaking from inside his experience, "But Adele Stackhouse, she welcomed you with open arms, didn't she?" Bill says, with something like the memory of the ghost of grief: "She was very gracious, yes." Bud lines them up. All those dead whores. "So. Maudette Pickens, Dawn Green, Adele Stackhouse. They were all very gracious to your, uh, *people*. That's just about the one thing they had in common. Now is that one hell of a plus-size coincidence, or what?" he asks, with a creepy smile barely hiding his hate. Bill responds that it's not a coincidence at all, surprising even Andy. "I suspect whoever did this is targeting women who associate with vampires." Meaning that even Bill knows this is Sookie's fault. "You can't be serious. Adele Stackhouse and a vamp?" No. Bill knows Adele wasn't the target.

But I wonder. I think the links between Maudette and Dawn and Adele are closer than we can admit, because sex is always implicit. Adele did more for vampires in Bon Temps than anybody: graciousness on a world-changing level. If the show's about a moment of social change, Adele signed her own death warrant. In the collapsed recollection of your children -- your life, told through a thousand soundbites and monochrome memories -- Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy died the same day. Marilyn, and Lennon. Your gods. Your nation broke, the way it's breaking now again, and any time you wonder why we are the way we are, remember that: We all wonder where we were when JFK -- or Lennon -- died, for a moment, before we remember that was before we showed up. We live in your dreams.

Sookie listens to the radio chatter, out on the porch, the youngest girl in the story. The innocent, the orphan, whose world got bigger until it broke. "I should probably call Jason." Sam offers to call him, and she swallows and nods, thanking him quietly. And off in a hotel room in town, Jason snores, and picks up his phone -- "Shake that ass!" -- and throws it through a shutter with v-juice power, shattering the blind. Randi Sue moves closer still; he clutches at her hand as he sleeps. Wanting her so much closer.

-- Page 5 --

Bill precedes the procession from the house, as Sam listens to Jason's voicemail message. "Bill, what's going on?" He tells her they're moving the body. They're taking her -- it, the body -- out of its house. Her home. Andy tells her to sleep somewhere else, somewhere safer, and she doesn't give a single moment of thought to it. This is home. It smells like home, all the dishes are where she likes them. Even Bill protests but she persists, even as the parade passes by. "This is my house. I'm staying right here." Neil from Kentucky stares, head-on at her and us for the first time, and she flashes on him at Fangtasia. (*Please God hope she didn't recognize me at the vampire bar I look different it was dark and...*) She tears her eyes, her mind away, and Bud Dearborn -- a friend of her family forever, a person she was trained to trust and to rely on; the man who would have saved Jason from Momma Thornton on the day of the Captain Morgan -- is sickened. Just looking at her face. ....*Dumb luck you're not in that bag right now screwing that vampire...*

Sookie's face changes and falls, as the world gets bigger: People die. Sheriffs hate. ....*You could be next...* The world of grownups, infallible and luxuriously protective and smart and well-intentioned, that world is gone. That world never existed. Sometimes adults turn on you; she learned that a long time ago. We learn it every day. But once the authorities fall down on the job, what's left? Sit at a red light at three AM and contemplate the meaning and the significance of that red light: Bud Dearborn is a sign of faith and strength, but he is not those things, any more than the corpse means home. People die. Sheriffs hate. And his words, so soft and unctuous beneath the thoughts: "I'm truly sorry about your grandmother..." She's done with him; from the list of the trusted he is removed. The one thing you want adults to do, they fail; the sheriff of the town is a monster, gleeful in her tragedy. "You all done in there? Because I'd like to clean up, if that's all right." Bud and Andy leave; Bill promises Bellefleur he'll take care of her, as long as he is able.

Bill and Sam agree she shouldn't be alone; Sam offers her his trailer, saying he'll sleep at the bar, but she looks from one to the other. Home is gone. Safe is gone. "I'm as safe here as anywhere," she says. And she's right. What has happened is fangs in flesh, or planes in buildings: the place where you were safe, you are not safe. Adele was her home: she was indistinguishable from the place and from the idea both. She was safety, and she wasn't safe, even in her place of power. "Besides, I got both of you to protect me, haven't I?" Not both. Bill, embarrassed, reminds her he has to go: it's nearly dawn.

-- Page 6 --

Bill's eyes linger on hers as he promises to return; Sam, of course, immediately steps forward: "I can take it from here." They face off, but it's a tale as old as time; she and Bill look into each other's eyes, both pleading. "Don't worry about me," she says. "Go." She watches him leave, and thinks for a moment. Broken, and lost, and numb. She has joined the orphans. Of all the people in the world there are two kinds: orphans and not-yet-orphans. Those without the net, however tenuous, and those who have a home they can go to, when the world becomes too large. She has gone from one world, one kind, one joy, and into another place. But the house stands, the people and the family stand, and if it will mean home someone will have to make that happen. "There's an extra mop round back. would you mind getting it for me?" He's terrified; he can smell it from here. She won't be dissuaded. "Gran took a lot of pride in her home. She wouldn't want anyone to see it like this." She goes around him, heading inside. He is horrified. But the way to a girl's heart is through her stomach. Tina drank deep. This is a way of replacing absence.

Sookie Stackhouse sits like Alice Liddell, in her gloves, at the side of a pool of blood. It is an object without meaning beyond the fact that what was once alive, once home, is now dead. It was an animating force, and now it is garbage. It needs to be taken care of. It's a lovely, troubling image, this: the girl, in her frock, kneeling by the blood, gloves to the elbow, taking up her cloth and scrubbing it clean. Tiny against the tall white walls, spattered with the fight, and the hate. The way she defended her home. With Sookie on a date and Jason on the ground, with the whole town wondering if vampires are people too, she stood in this room and she told death to wait awhile. She fought with hands, down to the bone she fought, and with words she pled. Death's not blind, it's deaf.

It is a sign and a story but it has nothing to do with home, and less to do with Gran. What's to do with Gran is this: she was home. She took pride in her home and she opened it to everyone: Sookie and Jason, Hadley, Tara Thornton, Bill Compton. A woman's power, in her day, was her home, and she took full advantage. And when monsters entered, she revoked their right to entry like a priest to a vampire. Her home was the refuge at the end of the world: when your parents are dead, when the grownups turn on you, her arms were open wide. She was proud of her home as she was proud of her soul, picking and scrubbing at every mark and blemish until it gleamed. That's Gran. Not a body in a pool or a memory or a victim, but this house all around you. It's what she would want. And fulfilling that brings her closer than a blanket wrapped around your shoulders; fulfilling that, applying object washcloth to object pool of blood, means feeling nothing at all. When she dropped to her knees that was Gran, that was the sign and meaning of horror, a story about loss and the ground dropping out from under you and your blood-soaked knees. This isn't a story, it's an act. It is deliberate and meaningless, and deliberately meaningless, but it's what she would have wanted. The smell and the feeling of her all around, the silence where her thoughts once were: they all want the evidence gone.

-- Page 7 --

Morning. The wake. That's always the worst bit. Maxine Fortenberry's tuna casserole knocks on the door and Maxine Fortenberry's tuna casserole is directed to the kitchen by Sam. And all through the house, Maxine Fortenberry's tuna casserole could hear, if it could hear thoughts, the thoughts of all the watchers and the gawkers: *...that Stackhouse girl hasn't come out of the kitchen ... heard she hasn't cried a single tear ... you know she's been going around with that vampire...* The voices fade into voices, until you don't know what's said aloud and what isn't. Sookie sits in the kitchen, while Tara and her cousin Lafayette take care of every little thing. Maxine pays her respects, but she lives for this shit.

Maxine Fortenberry says, "I am so sorry for your loss," but what she means is, "I am a person who cares about tragedy, I am a person who wants part of your tragedy: I will tell stories for years about the comfort you needed, and how I gave it, in your tragedy, a story about me. Eat this tuna casserole; in it is written and inscribed every hateful thought and every hungry moment of her death. They've cleaned up the blood and for that I do not thank them; oh, to be a fly upon the wall when he stuck it in. Not you, not Adele, not Jason or the rest are the story here. Show me your tragedy. Open a vein. Let me taste."

"Um... Gran often talked about you, so... Thank you." And what it was Gran said? Unprintable. The kind of woman who spends her life praying she or her relatives will have a child afflicted by something, a mental disability or sensory difficulty, deaf or blind, or some bodily infirmity (but not mental instability, never that, nothing that could reflect on her) so that she can play the victim. "Did you just say 'retarded'? That offends me on a basic level.

Let me tell you about my son's nephew-in-law, whom I've met twice in ten years, who has Asperger's Syndrome. Words hurt like a fist." A vampire and nothing less. The kind of overbearing, empty bitch that keeps Hallmark in business. Adele would spot her without a second look, and never afford her the second one. Adele wanted people's love for its own sake, not Maxine's sniveling love of horror and its uses, not the propaganda and excitement tragedy provides.

At the sink, Tara's grossed out by the sheer number of tuna cheese casseroles that seem to be speaking the language of grief for everyone attending. It's not even a joke. I don't even think there's a possibility of cramming enough food into this scene to reach absurdity, given the absurdity it actually contains. Is that a southern thing? (Would it be Maxine of me if I told you that's what that's like? Daddy got so sick of the fucking food showing up all the time he said it would be more efficient if they just came and sewed our buttons on, or organized his albums, or fixed the VCR, instead of all the cooking. Daddy is full of *bon mots*, but that's the one I remember best. That, and him telling the church ladies to leave the planned organ rendition of "Here Comes The Sun" off the program, so people would really freak out when his friend Robbie suddenly started playing it behind the rood screens. And they did, it was a showstopper. It's what she deserved.) Lafayette asks after Jason, and Tara -- suitably raw considering the last thing she did was toss garbage on his head while he played out *I ♥ Huckabee*s in the dirt seconds after pledging his eternal love -- spits back a response, Cain to Jason's Abel. Lafayette does a great move, kind of pointing at her with one finger and then dropping it. It's incredibly eloquent, this little movement, but I can't explain it. He helpfully translates: "Bitch."

-- Page 8 --

Maxine sucks deep. "Adele was an angel sent from Heaven. Too good for this world. We're all going to miss her so much..." But inside, oh. (...heard they almost cut off her head I don't see any blood I should have gotten here sooner maybe I should have brought my red velvet cake instead...) Sookie stands, done with it, done with the world of ugliness, with the contrast between the word and the deed and the thought behind the deed. Because we accustom ourselves to the failings of others fairly early, but this isn't a game, it's not a conversation: we're talking about a soul and thinking about a body. Maxine loved the soul; she wants to see the blood. As fucking hot as he is, I would almost like Hoyt to be the killer, just to embarrass Maxine. Give her a steaming cup of real drama and watch her fold. It's not as easy to martyr yourself when it's your own.

Sookie bumps into Arlene, looking a fright. She babbles at length, in tears, mascara running dramatically down her face while Sookie stares: it's impressive, how intense her breakdown has been. Especially knowing she's just another Maxine. Another person who blames her, thinks she's a fangbanger, thinks she called down God's wrath as easy as lightning. Who mourns that it was Adele got struck. "Now, if you need help with ..." Sookie nods with a friendly smile, she's heard it from everyone else in Bon Temps, if you need help with anything, blah blah... then she gets confused, as Arlene keeps talking. "Help with moving, or anything at all..." Sookie babbles: she isn't moving, who's moving? Not Sookie. Sookie's not leaving. This is all the Gran she has left; it's all the world she has left. Even vampires get coffins, when the world gets too big. It smells like her; the dishes are where she likes them.

All talk is advertising. Sookie knows it, because she sees both inside and outside at once, but spend a day in silence and you'll see what I mean: the way the words reverberate inside, showing you your propaganda: not what you really are, but who you want to be. There are

those who speak of grieving and wish to be seen grieving, and those who grieve where words don't go. There are those who speak of loving and wish to be seen loving, and those who love where words don't go. You talk about hurting when you're not hurting; you stay silent when you are. You don't speak of grieving when you're grieving, any more than you talk dirty when you're coming. The wake, the funeral, they're for the living to be alone together because we can't share this. As much as I love you, there are sparks we can't truly share, locked in these bodies as we are. That's the animal truth of the reverse cowgirl: We only truly feel things in wordlessness, because we are alone.

-- Page 9 --

"But honey, with it happening right here..." Sookie shakes her head. This is home: "I have far more good memories of this kitchen than bad ones." Arlene gets it, and congratulates her on that outlook: "You know, you really are smarter than anyone gives you credit for." Sookie looks at her, and she apologizes for that too. But there's a greater violation: Sookie whirls at the refrigerator door opening, and screams at Maxine. "Maxine Fortenberry, you put that pie down right now!" Putting her hateful hands on the pieces of home. Oh, to be a fly on the wall of your pain, crawling across the surface of that pie, tasting your grief and telling the story.

Someone calls from the parlor, "Come here, she's losing it!" Sookie stands in the kitchen, knees knocking, breath coming hard, holding the pieces of home in her hands. "This is Gran's pie!" Maxine apologizes, she was just trying to help, and thinks about how she spent the whole morning making her casserole, so that Sookie would recognize what a good woman she is. And all the thoughts go wild, sticking Sookie to the floor: crazy as a bedbug, knowing she killed her grandmother. She knows that already, she doesn't need the confirmation. Tara drags her upstairs for "girl time," dragging Lafayette hilariously behind, in case he didn't know he was included.

Upstairs Sookie notes she shouldn't have lost it; Tara tells her not to worry. "...That stupid old bitch ... been sticking her nose where it don't belong for years." Lafayette murmurs encouragement: "If she talked any more shit she'd be shaped like a toilet." Tara and Lafayette laugh quietly together as Sookie stares: they're more freshly acquainted with horror than she is. Lafayette apologizes for laughing, but Sookie's realized something. The pie plate is small, in her hands, and cold, and hard. "Gran's gone. She's really gone." Tara's voice is heavy with sympathy, and love: we've reached that point, have we? "Yeah. She is."

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I can't even think straight." Tara notes that it's impossible, Lafayette humming support behind her: "How can you, with all these circling buzzards? You know, you're not here to entertain them. You don't have to dance for them. You just have to feel whatever you're feeling." Sookie's not feeling anything. Is that okay? Is it weird to be numb? Should she be guilty for that too? "Numb is good. Numb's probably what you need right now. Stop worrying about being so appropriate." And of all the things, this is the best thing she says: "This is not an appropriate event." It's endemic to Sookieness to look for the right behavior, the line of best fit; she's crazy, retarded, prone to acting strange. Her whole life is looking for the appropriate: pretending to be normal, acting on what normal people already know. This is the one thing nobody knows how to do, and somebody needs to tell her that.

-- Page 10 --

Sookie looks from one to the other of them: "Thank you for getting me out of there. I haven't had a single minute of silence. Can't seem to block anything out right now." Tara offers to shut them all the hell up, to Lafayette's quiet chuckle, and Sookie says it's not that simple. "It is," Lafayette says, producing a baggie of pills: "Your wish... It is my command." Sookie shrinks back: "I don't do drugs." And what would Gran think? "Sook, relax. This is not drugs. This is just a Valium." Couldn't have said it better myself; he makes a cute face and Tara laughs ruefully. "Tell you what. Put in on your nightstand, just in case you change your mind." He heads out to check on the buzzards, and Sookie looks at him for the first time in six episodes. She entrusts him with the pieces of home and he promises to protect them with his life.

Jason's coming down, bright lights flashing on the periphery, music loud, speeding toward work. Rene sees him coming to the site and worries; Jason wipes the sweat from his forehead and joins them, looking all a junkie mess. They stare as he throws out excuse after excuse, alarm clock and phone lost, the world jerking and jump-cutting in front of him as he tries to come down. Hoyt touches his shoulder, and Jason gets scared.

Tara offers to call Sookie's cousin Hadley, with whom she shares more secrets than we know, and how they marked her: "No one's heard from her for in over a year, since she ran away from that rehab Gran paid for. I don't even know how to get hold of her..." I wish Hadley would come to the funeral; I wish she'd bring a gun. And Bill? Sookie looks at her like a racist: "Tara, he can't go." Tara remembers, and Sookie's like, "You don't know a bunch of vampires, so you're allowed to forget the daytime thing. Takes getting used to." Tara's not sure she ever will: "...What, not everyone is as open minded as you, shoot me. You should hear the things people are saying." Sookie is like, "Obviously I fucking do."

But Bill didn't kill Adele, and Tara knows that. "No one is blaming Bill... Exactly." But everybody is blaming Bill plus Sookie, including Bill and Sookie. "Didn't you tell me he had scary-ass friends?" Sookie swears they're not all like that, but surely Bill's hypothesis -- that Adele wasn't the target -- hasn't occurred to him alone. Death reminds us that we are fundamentally alone; that we spend most of our lives trying to be less alone, through sex or words or the chains we wrap each other in. That's what funerals do. "I'd fuckin' lose it if anything happened to you. You know that, right?"

-- Page 11 --

Yes. But in all the mess last night, the horror and the fear, the thing that kept her solid was Bill. "When I'm around him... I don't know how to explain it exactly, but it's like I almost feel normal." In the background a truck screeches to a halt and the door slams. Downstairs, Jason runs in, casting angry looks around, looking for a target. He heads upstairs. Sookie only says his name once before he's knocked her onto the bed.

"It's your fault! Gran is dead because of you. It should have been you!" Maudette, he saw the video. Dawn, he could have loved. Adele was a different story. This a circle, drawn around him, pulling tight as he's heading into the labyrinth. The only link he sees is the one that makes her filthy; the trap he feels caught in. He let it touch him, he let it crawl inside and now it lives there. And his sister is just as dirty as he is.

Tara shoves him away, but he's not stopping. "She's screwing a vampire, Tara. A fucking vampire!" A vampire who, she points out, was there for Sookie when he wasn't. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Is that how your grandmother raised you? To beat on your sister?"

Look at you!" She breaks into angry, hot tears, shoving him back out of the bedroom, linking this violence to the sex to the drugs: "I don't even recognize you anymore! Get the hell out of here. Get out!" He leaves the safety of that space reluctantly, sad eyes on his sister as Tara shoves him out and locks the door and falls back on the bed with Sookie, who shivers and reaches down for the Valium. Word, girl.

Embarrassed, sick and grieving, light jerking in his vision, Jason runs away from the scene of his crimes and is help up by Detective Bellefleur. He tries to get past three times, but makes the mistake of calling him "Andy." He can't remember the girl's name, or phone number, because he can't find his phone, so now his fake Tara alibi is as questionable as this new one. Andy calls this suspicious and Jason asks if he's honestly fucking suggesting that he killed Adele. He doesn't wait before tossing Andy angrily across the yard, denting a truck. He speeds to his truck and flies away, even as Lafayette is staring: "You're a stupid bitch, Jason Stackhouse." Yep, that about covers it.

Inside, Maxine drinks deeply. "Jason Stackhouse tossed Andy Bellefleur like he was nothing but a ragdoll!" Arlene says even the men -- "thicker than walls!" -- on the *Friday Night Smackdown* Rene watches couldn't do that. Lafayette refills their sweet tea and covers like a good dealer: "You know Jason, he works out a lot. He's real strong." Maxine doesn't care, because drama, and Arlene just gives Lafayette a look like he's fucking Jason. Tara comes down the stairs clapping her hands, ordering everyone out. The holdouts, of course, are Arlene and Maxine... And Sam. "Look, I get it. But right now she needs to be alone... You're a good friend. Now get the fuck out of here. Please." She chases off the stragglers, and Maxine is awful some more on her way out, picking at the buffet the way she picks at anything else. For what's left.

-- Page 12 --

"What the fuck is it with white people and Jell-O? I don't understand." (Lafayette is apparently the only one that got the memo that said he had to deliver at least one "white people they be like this but black people they be like this" joke a week.) Tara stares at the insane amount of food left over, and he tells her to toss it: "Sookie does not need no bad juju cooking. Way to a man's heart is through his stomach, that shit is as true as gold. Put some love in your food and the folks will taste it. Smell this: you can smell the evil and nastiness coming out that cornbread." Tara eats a piece and remarks it feels fine, and he tells her she'll regret it. "Watch."

Watch Sookie sleeping; the squeaking sound as a door opens on her, and then a blue shirt with white stitching, and hands around her throat. She gasps out his name, choking; he wakes, on the cold ground. Beneath Bill's house there is a little room, where the world touches the cold ground, and that's where he sleeps. His eyes fly open and he looks at his watch: the sun is only just setting. He screams, pulling desperately against gravity. He can barely get his off the cold ground, no matter how hard he tries. He's dying, while she's dying, and he can't do anything about it. He can't make her alive again. The earth pulls at him: home.

Downstairs Lafayette sweeps up while Tara picks up furniture with one of her She-Hulk pinkies; she's wondering if she should check on the recently throttled Sookie (Lafayette: "Trust me, that child is dead to the world right now") just as the door flies open and Bill zooms through the house, up the stairs, to her side. Tara and Lafayette follow the blur -- Lafayette wielding a deadly broom -- as Bill shakes her awake, terrified that she's gone. I

think he really does love her. She finally wakes, looking at him through a valium haze. But if she's still alive, it must have been a dream, right? A silly dream, hers or his, nothing to be concerned about. A natural consequence of all that's happened.

(I don't actually believe that. If you've ever taken a Valium you probably don't either. I see her pulling a *Ruby In The Smoke* sometime in the near future and randomly producing the face of the killer. I don't know why she didn't die, but I think that really happened. And if it didn't, it was her dream, not his. But I don't think she'll remember this conversation either, so it hardly matters.)

"Don't worry," Bill says, even as she's slipping away, "I'm not going anywhere. Go on." She drops back again, into sleep, and pulls his arm around her, just like Jason when she's sleeping. He pulls his hand out of her grasp and looks at her from the edge of the bed, like he's praying. Later, Tara watches him on the lawn, standing, staring up. He looks beautiful, and strong. He looks like Lloyd Dobbler. "Do you think they're capable of loving a person?" Lafayette joins her at the window and wonders what all they're capable of. That dog joins him on the lawn, of course, and they both look up, standing strong, like men. Bill smiles down at the dog and takes a sip of his TruBlood; the dog whuffs a hello. When is a spoiler not a spoiler? When it's got a huge neon arrow pointing at it for six weeks in a row.

-- Page 13 --

Funeral. A woman sings at the lectern, Jason's jittery legs go crazy, Arlene weeps with Rene beside her, just behind Sookie. Lafayette's in a suit, without his usual headgear; Terry Bellefleur is going nuts as usual. Jason sweats and shakes. "Oh sinner, come home," she sings, as Jason wipes eyes with necktie. The preacher stands, to gather the life of Adele Stackhouse: "To celebrate the time she enjoyed here on earth, and to thank you for each precious moment..."

A creature arrives, in the daylight, in a wheelchair, pushed by Neil the apprentice. A jolt runs through Sookie and she squeezes Tara's hand until it hurts. Jason doesn't know anything; he taps the creature's knee with a fist. She stares at it, even as the preacher speaks. Its head is bald and wrinkled; its eyes contain a multitude of sadnesses and sins. She is revolted; she asks him what the fuck he's doing there. Uncle Bartlett. "But even as we grieve, we shall be comforted knowing that she's in peace now in the Lord's kingdom. And there shall not be more death." Nothing is lost and nothing is forgotten.

"Uncle Bartlett, what are you doing here?" Bartlett can barely meet her eyes: "She was my sister." Sookie's not having it; Sookie knows the boundaries more than anyone alive. It's how she stays alive. "You haven't been part of this family in a long time." He looks back at her, in silence. "Sook, come on. Give the guy a break," says Jason. He doesn't know anything. She is marked; her mind was never her own, but her body was once. The preacher says her name once, twice, calling her to the lectern to deliver a eulogy. She stands unsteadily, nodding at Tara, and heads to the front as Sam watches. Bartlett looks away.

"Adele Stackhouse was everything to me. She wasn't just my grandmother, she was my parent, my teacher... And my best friend." (...oh please if it weren't for you she would be alive ... what's this world coming to, a vampire giving a eulogy ... I thought she was a good girl I guess you can never know ... you should be in that coffin and we all know you...) Sookie clears her thoughts, with Bartlett looking on. "To say she'll be missed just doesn't cut it, because I can't even imagine a world without her in it. She was always there, with a kind word and a

hot meal, and a shoulder to cry on. Not just for me, but..." She swallows. Bartlett nearly weeps. (...forgive me Adele please forgive me I never meant to hurt anyone but I couldn't...) "For everyone who knew her." (... poor pathetic thing she is as nuts as nuts can be ... sleep with your grandmother's killer she is dead because of you...) "Shut up!" Sookie finally screams. Don't they know she knows that?

-- Page 14 --

"All of you, shut the fuck up!" They gasp, and think twice as hard. (*Look at her cursing ... this whole world's just ... plain crazy lock her up and throw away the key.*) Sam is shocked, staring at her; she gives up and runs. Just hauls ass. Tara watches sadly as Jason throws himself after her; the preacher asks for another speaker. "I've got something to say," a woman says, in an unforgettable, shaking voice. Tara closes her eyes; Lafayette puts his hand on her shoulder. Momma Thornton, shaky on her pins, makes her way around the assembled group; Tara grabs at her as she heads for the lectern but there's no stopping her. "Oh my fucking God, girl. This is about to be ugly."

Momma Thornton takes the stage. "I didn't know Miss Stackhouse like a lot of you did. But the few times I did meet her... She was nothing but kind to me. She was a good, God-fearing woman." Her eyes slide off her daughter; she continues. "And when I was... Going through some bad things, my daughter would go stay with her. And I always knew she'd be just fine. Adele Stackhouse took care of my baby when I couldn't." She's speaking to Tara now. "And I'll always be grateful for that." Her loneliness is private; all loneliness is private, just as all grief is private. Like any funeral, we attend alone.

Jason chases his sister through a graveyard, completely alone, having fucked up in more ways than he knows, calling her name. "Sookie, just hold on a sec!" She barely pauses. "Why, so you can hit me again? Go ahead, tell me it's all my fault. Tell me how much you wish it were me in that coffin." She shakes her head, meaning it: "I deserve it." My first thought, when I could think it, was the same as yours when you heard: that I was to blame. But you didn't see her there; you didn't know it in your body, that it is true.

"No, I'm sorry." Almost weeping, he steps closer, begging for forgiveness, but she steps away. Her body is a territory, and it is hers. Without home, among the orphans, it's all we have. "Well, I didn't mean to hurt you. You gotta know that." Hurt? The hitting? That was nothing. That was nothing, compared to what he did next. "You invited Uncle Bartlett!" He doesn't know; he honestly doesn't know. Jason swears, to her terrified eyes, her shaking hands, that Bartlett deserved to be there. "Look, I know he and Gran had their problems, but whatever they were, it don't matter no more. Cause that's what a family does, we forgive each other." Sookie's amazed, as ever, at her brother's ignorance of subtext. He has no idea what he's talking about. Jason stares at her, alone in his grief. They have joined the orphans; their family is each other. "Sookie please. I mean, we're all we got." But Sookie knows better: "We've got nothing." We are alone.

-- Page 15 --

She walks away, and he knows she's right. He's got nothing. There's too much death with us today; he needs more life. When you see the sparks you remember that none of us are alone; when you see death and that dead confusion and rage in her eyes you realize that's all we are. A body, any body, is just a naked dangling signifier for a mystery you forgot. He almost falls over with the weight of it, jerking at his jacket tails like a child. They're both right.

Maxine puts away her handheld fan and waves at Momma Thornton like a waitress at a busy restaurant: "Hey. I was moved. Very moved." Maxine was moved; she had a feeling, she was moved by what happened. You hear? "You know, you should come to our next Descendants of the Glorious Dead meeting," she offers. To the only black lady at the funeral. Fucking Maxine. "That some kind of support group? I went to one of those AA meetings once. They were nothing but a cult." Maxine's undone as far as responding, but Tara saves her, grabbing her elbow and jerking her away even as Momma tries to introduce her to Maxine. "We met. Like a hundred times too many. Excuse us." Maxine hates Tara some more, but Tara couldn't care less.

"What the hell are you doing?" Momma begs her to stop, she's hurting her arm, and Tara thinks that's rich. "The last time I saw you, you were beating my head with a bottle." Momma weeps. "Oh, sweet Jesus. You poor child. I'm so sorry." She puts her arm around her, and Tara takes it like a ragdoll. Her body is a territory. She peels her mother's arm from around her back. "You had no right to speak for that woman. She was more of a mother to me than you ever were." Without saying she's grieving, she grieves. "She took care of me. She fed me, she put clothes on me. She called Social Services on you twice. You hated her guts." Momma protests, but Tara remembers: "Yes you did. You used to call her a white devil bitch."

Momma shakes her head. "No, Tara, that wasn't me. That wasn't me that said those things." Tara shakes hers back. "Just 'cause you were too drunk to remember don't mean it never happened." But that's not what she's saying: "Just listen. All those terrible things I did to you, it wasn't me who did them." Tara shakes her head, confused. "I have a demon inside me." After a beat, Tara's like, "Um, what?" Yeah. Demon actual. "Living and breathing inside me. Eating me up." Tara cracks up, because fuck you, and no amount of God-fearing bullshit from Momma's stupid mouth is going to stop her. The latest Get Out Of Jail card in a long line of them: not too far off the Jesus thing, but with a twist! "Don't you laugh at the devil, Tara Mae, because this is as serious as cancer."

-- Page 16 --

"I'm sorry, you have a demon inside you? Oh fuck me, that's too good." Momma breaks down, being honest: "You have no idea on what I'm going through wrestling with this demon. I try and do right, I try so hard... but it breaks me down, and poisons everything." Sounds like Tara. "I want to be the momma you deserve. I can make up for everything, I can. It's not too late." Everything you ever wanted to hear; like Sookie's mother and her grandmother, coming back from the head. It was all a mistake, an unfortunate coincidence. I never meant to hurt you. "I can't do this alone. I gotta get it out of me. And it's very expensive..." Tara almost vomits. "And that's why you came to this women's funeral? Because you want money?" Momma says she has nowhere else to go, but Tara's done. She stalks away, and Momma's screaming: "Tara, please. Don't walk away from me, I'm still your momma. I need you." They are orphans; we are all orphans: "You're all I've got!"

Sookie walks randomly through the graveyard, finds the old section. The Glorious Dead. The grave is half-covered, in leaves of ivy. She kneels and stares down at it, wiping them away: *William Thomas Compton*. She jumps back. He is dead.

Jason shivers as they pay their respects; they speak but he can't hear them as he jerks and shakes. If you can put a name on it, if you can name it and the way it feels, if you can name the demon then you can feed that demon. A whole life spent wondering what that aching

pain was, and here it is; a whole life spent wondering what was missing, and it was there all along. Loneliness, that no body can shake, and fear, that no amount of love can erase. Andy threatens him as he goes, but Jason's too far gone to care. In his truck he yanks and pulls at his necktie, exposing his throat, sweating through his shirt, crazy and breathing hard. One last bit, one drop in the glovebox, in a clean little baggie. Give it a name. The opposite of death is life. Feel it driving through you, let it take the wheel for just a moment. The second drugs stop being acceptable is when you can't do without them, yes, but this isn't drugs. It's just a Valium. He cranes his neck, opens his mouth wide, wanting it more than anything.

But the V is life and life, today, is all too much. There is only one person that could possibly offer him comfort. He punched her in the mouth, and then committed a crime he still doesn't understand. He has joined the orphans and been deserted by his sister. What if he feels it more? What if this drop enters his heart, and it begins to beat, and the blood that flows through him pulses with sadness? He tosses it out the window: be a man, be strong. Somebody has to be strong. We can't all go running off in the middle of a funeral, dancing across a graveyard, bitching about uncles and this and that. Somebody's got to feel this. Somebody has to miss her.

-- Page 17 --

He is not a man. He is a boy, terrified and broken-hearted, and there is no one left to share his pain. He digs through the dirt and grass and garbage, under the truck and on the ground, desperate for his drug. He is completely gone. This is not an appropriate event.

The gravedigger winds the gears and the body slowly, quietly, gracefully descends into the cold ground. This is not all that we are. Adele's real body is back home, where it smells like her. Sam joins Sookie and watches the body descend. "I liked your speech. What I heard of it, anyway. She looks at him. Especially the part when you told the town to shut the fuck up." Sookie almost grins, staring at the coffin: "Yeah, I'm a real crowd-pleaser." Sam begs to take her home, and offers her elbow; she takes it. In the space they leave behind, the coffin comes to its rest.

On the porch, Sookie stops to dig out her keys; Sam tells her to take a bath and begs to stay with her, to watch movies with aliens, romantic comedies. To be of use, to be helpful, to keep watch, to bark when he gets nervous, to lick her hand until she smiles. "Sam, not now. I just... I need to be alone." He nods and she heads inside, thanking him. On the porch, he breathes the enormity. Tara walks up, shoes in hand, from the graveyard. Sam tells her Sookie wants to be alone; they agree they don't want to be alone. Nobody ever does. That's what death tells us.

The stupid thing about death is that it doesn't really matter what happens next: life is a party and everybody's invited. And when you die, you're not at the party anymore. When they told me about death that was how I formulated it, and that's still the worst fucking thing I can think of, twenty-something years later. The whole system is stupid. I keep writing these paragraphs about that over and over and it just seems really whiny and selfish, but it's like: people are only dead, actually painfully dead, when you want to tell them something, to make them laugh or because it reminded you of a thing, or when ask them something, because they're the only ones that would know what you mean, or remember the fact you want to remember. The rest of the time they're just... drifting, like 90% of the people you've ever met, or even loved.

I've got people on Facebook I love deeply that I haven't talked to in five years, ten years, but the possibility that I *could* is implicit. If I wanted to get in touch with so-and-so from high school I could do that in a snap: that's exactly as far as relationships were meant to stretch. Which I love, because it used to be taking their number and never calling, which is more actively dismissive but something I'm hardly above. The possibility, the thought of them, alive, in you: that's something, because you can think of them a hundred times a day and know that you have the possibility of telling or asking them something, and often it is enough. They're doing the same thing. Your love is an alive thing that stretches from your body wherever it is, to their body wherever it is, and you don't even need to know those locations in order to feel that. But death says: no way. Death is a bunch of bullshit compared to Facebook.

-- Page 18 --

Which is just one of the many ways death is tacky, because death also says: you know how you're utterly, irrevocably alone? You have an infinite number of doors inside you and every single door opens onto a singular, unimaginable world, and all you want is for somebody to step inside one of them and take a look around and feel at home there. For somebody to take a good sniff of that house and understand that it smells like you, and say that they wouldn't mind living there. You want to invite someone inside you, to look at all your bits and understand them, see them, hear the words you can't say; to look at the sparks inside your skin and know how alive they really are. And that is never, ever going to happen, says death.

If I stared into your eyes for a million years, if she sunk her teeth into your flesh, if he fucked you for the rest of your lifetime, you would still be alone in there. Sam could follow me around all day long like a dog with a bone and while that would be almost optimally hot, it wouldn't solve the existential equation any more than drugs do. Neurologically speaking, love is just a flying leap under the assumption that what's inside your sack of guts is close enough to mine that we will be less alone.

And of us all, Sookie's the only one with personal experience enough to know how little that means, because only Sookie has been trained by life to understand how ugly those unspoken thoughts can get, when we keep them in the echo chamber and never let them out. It's what brings her and Tara into loving each other: she loves Tara because Tara knows all this and doesn't give a fuck, while Sookie looks at it and knows that if there's no rules inside your head then all that matters is being firm about the rules. But what neither of them know yet -- and Jason does -- is that we could spend a lifetime talking and never really get anyway, because the words are preferable but they're still just advertising. But no matter what, it's not going to stop us, and the world turns on that: we spend every second of every day trying to climb inside each other and disprove that futility, and that is terribly dumb and it is wonderfully brave.

The empty house, Gran's clean floor. Sookie stares at the place; there's a dripping sound. She steels herself and walks inside. She takes the pie out of the fridge and sits calmly, removing the plastic. She takes up a fork and pauses, then the first bit from the center. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, that shit is as true as gold. Put some love in your food and the folks will taste it. Smell this: you can smell the love and sweetness coming out of that pie. It tastes like home. It tastes like sadness and it tastes like absence, but she chokes it down around her sobs. It smells like Gran; it tastes like love. Like she's still here, every bite a word or a peck on the cheek or the strongest hug on the worst day. It tastes like

life. And by the time she's done, all that's left of Gran will be hers, smell and taste. She weeps and takes it in; it is a duty no less profound and no more insane than sopping up the blood. It is a funeral; we attend alone.

-- Page 19 --

Sam and Tara pull up to her motel room. All around them is life, unbounded, joyous, silly. An obese couple waves to her over their fried chicken as the children bitch and squabble. It's life. Tara lets Sam in as a woman nearby threatens somebody with death, breaking a bottle. She laughs: "Don't worry. She says that all the time." They discuss how sad it is as Tara offers him a warm beer from the shopping bag near the door, and sits on the bed. Sam's amazed at the relative squalor, making her uncomfortable: "I thought you were staying with Lafayette?" Yeah, until she discovered the webcam in his bathroom, she laughs. "No way I'll let a bunch of perverts watch me pee." It never occurred to me to wonder where my line is. I'm going to have to think about that some more.

Sam joins her on the bed, laughing, and says she should have told him. "Why? So you could ride up on your white horse and save me?" He rolls his eyes, frustrated, and bitches about how she turns everything into a fight. "Why is it so hard to let someone be just nice to you?" Tara pulls it together and suggests that it's her bad self-esteem and can't express her real feelings except through sarcasm. As usual, she's telling the truth so big it sounds like a lie. She tries to do right, but it's hard. It breaks her down and poisons everything. He tries to leave and complains of always being teased: Tara, Sookie. Give a dog a bone! She beats him to the door, slamming it closed with her giant muscley arms. "I don't want to play games," he protests. "I don't want no strings. I just ... I want something real in my life." Tara feels the same way; she glimpses a spark in him and takes his face in her hands, studying him. She puts her arms around him as he swears it's real. "If we do this, we really did this." She nods and puts her forehead to his, kissing him softly, and then harder.

The whole pie is gone. Sookie wanders out of the kitchen, turns back to look at the empty plate one more time. The last pieces of home, gone. She stares at herself in the mirror, taking down her hair. Off comes the jacket, and then the dress. Who's that in there? An orphan. A girl without a home. Retard, psycho, Stackhouse trash. A fangbanger. A whore. A girl without a home, like any outcast, can be anything she likes. What would that be? What would solve this problem? How can she feel less alone, without feeling invaded? What makes her feel good? What replaces this fear and loneliness and desperate sadness?

-- Page 20 --

She pulls on a flowing, ridiculous white gown. Puffed sleeves and a mile-long hem, like the movies, like a princess. Like a virgin, unmarked. Untouched territory. What was Hadley thinking, when she left rehab this last time? Did she feel like a prisoner, locked in a castle that wasn't her home? Or did she just look down at herself one day, or into the mirror, and realize it was time to claim that territory for herself? Sookie stares out the window, at the setting sun.

As it hisses on the horizon Sookie hurls herself from the house, down the road and across the field, into the graveyard. Bill wakes and throws the doors open; the Compton house takes a breath of night as he runs onto the porch. He can feel her coming, or it is a wish. She is coming to him across the graveyard. He closes his eyes, straining for her, and finally smiles: There she is. He meets her on the field, under the moon, and they kiss hungrily. Less

alone. He's known death, a hundred years of death and the loneliness that follows. He alone knows just how hungry her skin must be. He brings her silence, and forgiveness, and like Adele, no judgment whatsoever. Only love.

For one night we are all Jason Stackhouse: climbing into each other's skin the best way we know how, to shove a burning brand into the face of death and say, "not today," and "not ever" and "I am not alone." Looking for those sparks across his skin. Tara screams wordlessly and falls back on the bed, muttering profanities as Sam chuckles above her. He looks down into her eyes; the couple next door comes to an annoying reconciliation. The woman tells the man she loves him, so much; he says he had to come back. She's all he has, now. "I need you," says the woman, who is Randi Sue. "I need you so fucking much. You're all I've got." Tara stares and thinks about need, about orphans. Jason, Sookie, Sam. All the people she loves are orphans. And she's not; she has deserted her mother, who is all alone and in over her head. She shrugs Sam off, and he's confused. "Tara, what just happened? Did I do something?" She puts on her funeral dress and shakes his head, tossing him pants. "It's not about you. I'm sorry. I'll see you at work, okay?"

Next door, Randi Sue rides Jason's v-juiced dick, facing away from him, sending words and moans out into space, screaming how much she loves him. All words are advertisements. He lies below her, finally alone, and grieves: for himself, for Tara, for Sookie and Adele, for Hadley and Bartlett, for the drugs and his complete powerlessness, for himself as an orphan, as an abuser, for Maudette Pickens, for Dawn, for the exquisite loneliness she rides. Nobody sees it. He grieves most purely of us all.

-- Page 21 --

Bill lays Sookie down by the fireside, in her white dress, on a pillow and a blanket of velvet red. He kisses her, reaching behind to open up her dress. Cat Power kills all boners but those of the undead, it is a fact. She pulls him down to her, and he kisses her softly in the firelight. He's never looked so human, or so strong. He kisses her neck, takes her thumb in his mouth; she rakes a hand down his back. That's what does it; he's embarrassed, as ever, by his body's responses to desire. His fangs pop out and he hangs his head upon her breast. She asks what's wrong, and he shows her. She considers him; his shame, and his beauty. He looks for the fear, but it melts away, from her face. There's nobody watching, now. She's not afraid, anymore: just curious. She guides his head down, kissing him softly. There's just the two of them, pressing desperately, skin against skin. Trying desperately to be whole:

Tara comes home to Momma Thornton, passed out on the couch. "I knew you'd come," she says. You're all I've got. She holds out a hand, and Tara lies down beside her on the tiny couch, their arms around each other, and they sleep.

They're both naked as he kisses her neck. It's getting harder. He tries to resist, tries to be there with her, to continue his education. She looks up. There is literally nothing stopping her and nothing stopping her. They are all alone. Whatever might happen, it's already happened. Hated? Done. Murder attempts? She doesn't even know how many. Family dead? Check. Self-worth? In hand. Gran is dead. Bill is dead. She loves them both. He is the silence. There's nothing to fear, at all, anymore. The world is big.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, that shit is as true as gold. Put some love in your food and the folks will taste it. You can smell the love and sweetness coming off her, the orphan girl, making her first grownup decisions. This feels like home. It tastes like

sadness and it tastes like absence; it tastes like love. It tastes like life. And by the time he's done, all that's left of the orphan girl will be hers and his, smell and taste. This body is her territory, to mark as she chooses; she chooses him. She claims her skin, her body, by offering it to someone else, out of love. She says when and she says who. I don't know how else we heal.

"Do it. I want you to." She arches back, offering her neck. If we do this, we did this.

He hesitates, and then sinks deep, blood flowing out around his mouth; she pulls and grasps at him, moaning and gasping, neither in pain nor pleasure. For a moment they are less alone.

## SHOW ME HOW YOU DO THAT TRICK

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 7 | Aired on 10.19.2008

*Burning House Of Love* - Tara and Jason meet some witches, Bill is probably suckin' sunshine somewhere, and Sookie investigates what life is like for skanks.

Sookie and Bill have a good deal of unnervingly realistic sex, not only heating up the cold open but also turning his hair super cute again, and causing Sookie to spend the episode acting like Gidget on Fizzy Lifting Drink. Sookie is slightly bummed out that cashing her v-card brings up the memories of Bartlett's molestation -- and "unknowingly" gets the old shithead killed, courtesy of Mr. Compton -- but does her best to firmly reclaim her sexuality, to the point of giddily telling a bar full of Merlotte's patrons that sex with vampires is, as a matter of fact, intensely awesome.

Less awesome? The continued issues with Jason, as he raids Adele's house -- now Sookie's -- for stuff to hock for V. Lafayette having dried up as a source, deaf even to Jason's offerings of "weiner," Jason takes the inordinately retarded route of visiting Fangtasia! looking for vampire blood. Several people -- dead and undead alike, and including the deliriously awesome Vampire Pam -- try to explain how tacky that is, but he seems determined as ever to get his cute ass killed. Kinda like his sister, announcing her new fangbangertude to the entire town while they're drinking.

Enter Amy, who turns being a refugee from the self-absorbed intellectualizing Seven Sisters corner of *Six Feet Under* into art. She loves Jason because he's "authentic," digs on the retro semiotics of his truck and house, instructs him in the Gaia theory and basic chemistry, and basically bores the shit out of him, but at least she's holding. Of course, that all changes after they fuck on V, because it's totally meaningful. Thank God she's played by the inhumanly perfect and delightful Lizzy Caplan, or she'd be fucking unbearable instead of grimly hilarious.

Oh, Sam Watch. Well, he's even hotter this week in the Tara scenes, but his requisite weirdness involves running naked through the trees. If he's not a werewolf or something, I'm going to be bummed out, because if you add it all up any other way he's just, like, a total weirdo.

Tara is content to ignore all her mother's demon talk until a couple of super-intense freakouts -- including an unbelievably distressing breakdown in the middle of a bank -- convince her to pay a beautiful, crooked forest witch to exorcise the thing by putting it into a possum, then drowning it. After a few false starts with Sam, though, I think she's going to be tempted to take a look at her own demons, and possibly put them in a possum.

Also attempting to scapegoat their shit into dead things are cutie-pie Royce and his white trash brethren, last seen getting their asses handed to them by a juiced-up Lafayette and chowing on AIDSburgers. When their vampire opposites -- Diane, Liam and dear old Malcolm -- move into town looking for some affection from Bill, he's forced to go with them as a ploy to keep Sookie and Merlotte's safe. The rednecks retaliate for their Tackiness by napalming their nest. The bad news? There was a fourth man in the fire: presumably, Bill Compton.

Anyway, amazing episode. Next week: *I'm so sure!* Bill is in no way dead, Longshadow and Eric continue to act like dicks, and Pam finally gets to show off one of her impressive collection of adorable twinsets.

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

"Show me how you do that trick," she said. And he did: and all the fear, and pain, and loneliness, drained out of her and into him. Like a possum in a witch's cauldron: strange as angels, dancing in the deepest oceans, twisting in the water. When we talk about the sacrifice, about the deepest magic humans ever know, we're not talking about expelling, banishing, fear, ugliness. That's just a byproduct. What we're talking about is reclamation of what we already have. What we've always had. Your body is your playground and your temple, and it is your home. Just like Heaven.

Bill licks at her blood and buries his fangs deep. "Do it," she said. She wanted him to. She wanted to know that her body was her territory, that she could with it what she wanted. She needed someone to remind her that they never took it from her; that it was hers all along. Her beautiful body, and her beautiful soul: only remember that you are clean, no matter what happens. You are pure, and you deserve happiness. That nobody can take away your body: they can only fool you into thinking that they've won.

The soul is not found within the body. The body rests inside the soul. And no matter what they tell you, no matter how they try to take it from you, mark it, burn it black, turn yourself against yourself, that's one thing we will always know. Somewhere quiet and secret, saying, "You can come home." That there's not a room in your house that remains locked to you; there's not a place in your soul or in your body that doesn't completely belong to you. It is impossible to mark a soul or take it for your own. There is no devil that can do that; no demon that can take possession, that doesn't know the truth and fear always that we'll rout it out.

He looks into her eyes, with his fangs out, and takes her virginity. Finally, finally home. She arches up against it, kissing him hungrily; after a moment they relax into the memory and the knowledge of home. They are strange angels, lit by the fire, redrawing maps and marking out their territory. He is just the guide: he shows her where she could have lived, inside that lovely little house. The infinite landscape between his teeth and her hands, pulling hard at him, pushing him deeper: an expanse of skin, a territory of desire, a country she'd forgotten about. They are lovely in the firelight. I think there are two kinds of people: those that know this story -- knew it the second Sookie tightened her grip on Tara at the funeral -- and the lucky ones that don't. But no matter how weird you find Sookie's behavior in this episode, you should know this: She is unmarked and was never otherwise. The only tragedy is that she never even knew it. This -- the blood, the fucking, all of it -- it's not pollution, it's a reminder of our purity. No ritual is empty. I don't know how else we heal.

-- Page 2 --

When we talk about the sacrifice it's not about what you lose: it's not about the scapegoat, or the blood, or the possum or the sparks between your body and mine. It's about reclaiming what we forgot; what we already, always, eternally have. The body rests inside the soul, and the soul is beautiful and without blemish. No matter what they tell you. This is war; this is an act of war.

I know God looks different for everybody, but I'm an Aries and I don't have time to sugarcoat it: we're taught, as part of being good little boys and girls, that war is bad and wrong. And if I tell you this is war, you might find that harsh. Especially if you -- and you did, and that's fine -- find it sexy, a turn-on. If it's an act of pure war then it cannot be an act of pleasure. And this is where Lafayette, and his double Jeanette, can teach us; it's what Jason keeps learning and forgetting, which is that any two absolutes can -- and must -- exist in the world, if the world is big enough. Sex can be purely war and purely pleasure, and for proof we must only look at nature: all it is, is pure war and pure pleasure. That passion is where they meet, without fear: That nature is all we have, and it is pure, like you and me.

Sookie rests in a candlelit bath, laughing and watching as he wipes steam from the mirror and looks at himself. "I thought you were supposed to be invisible in a mirror!" He admits the mirror thing, like most of the myths, is just careful PR: "If humans thought that we couldn't be seen in a mirror, it was another way for us to prove that we weren't vampires. And that way, we could stay hid." His hair is looking totally cute, for which we can apparently thank intercourse; his flat, silly ass is lovable as he climbs in with her. "So what about holy water?" Just water. "Crucifixes?" Geometry. "Garlic?" Irritating, but that's pretty much it.

Sookie laughs, woozy in the water: "I feel a little weak." Bill points out, leaning close to touch her shoulder, to touch the skin of her body with the skin of his hand. "Of course you do. I fed on your blood. You should take some vitamin B-12 to replenish." Sookie asks if that's something she needs to do every day, but the implicit promise lights his eyes: he will be feeding every day, because there is nothing like that feeling of being known and loved, in just that way. If, as Jason's learning, the V is life in a liquid because they run entirely on it -- that what animates them is not what animates us -- then to give them what they need is the same, but in reverse. V, for us, is life squared. Blood, for them, is all there is.

-- Page 3 --

"If you don't mind, yes. And no garlic." (I have to admit that was going to be my next question.) They smile and he leans back; they have struck a deal. The pieces of her soul she thought she'd lost forever are arranged in a precise new order; they are redrawing maps of territory long-ago relinquished and they are creating a new way of living. They are engaging in each other. He sits back and smiles at her, full of love. All we ever give each other is just like this: pieces of our souls, pieces of our bodies. There's a reason it's called making love. "Is it always like this?" she asks, and he smiles with infinite tenderness. After a certain length of life there is no regret, just an understanding of how big the world really is: "No, it is not." And that is what it means. They have created something wonderful, tonight, and all the benefits of that, the pieces of their souls they have knitted back together, it stands apart from them. No ritual is empty.

"I never thought I'd be able to..." It never seemed entirely realistic that the reason she kept this to herself, so close to the vest, was because men are beasts and she could hear them. You can learn the horrors and the beauties just as easy watching their bodies and their eyes, anybody knows that. Even Bill. "I am honored that you chose me." The loveliest sentiment; the continuation of her princess earlier in the evening, lost and lonely, soft and tired and running out across the fields in a gown. The thing we want them most to understand: what we've given, what it cost, how long we've held it tight. And her face falls, because that was a choice, but it wasn't the first choice in history. That was taken. She remembers Bartlett

briefly, prisoner of war in a vampire's lap, but not briefly enough, and Bill watches her face, not old enough yet to see that face and not be stricken by what it says and what it means.

Back to Heaven. She sits in the tub, knees pulled to her chest, covering what she's got; curled in the warm water of the tub. She compares her experience to other girls' and boys', all the different ways they have to try and take away your body from you. "It was just touching," she says, which is heartbreaking. As though it's anything but asymptote. As though she has claim on only so much pain and no more. As though she doesn't deserve the gift she found tonight. Like her pain is less worthy. "Did you tell anyone?" Sookie nods.

"Gran. She ran him off and never spoke to him again." Her voice is sickened, for Adele as much for anything: "Her own brother." But brothers, they can disappoint you. Just because you draw the lines of family like so doesn't mean anybody else has to follow your lead. We all have lines.

-- Page 4 --

Bill, sweetly, assures her it wasn't her fault. Her voice is sharp: "I know that. But..." He nods. He's old enough to know the pain, when our history refuses to cooperate. "Here I am. I mean... Just had one of the most important experiences in a girl's life." She means it, every word. "It was so, so perfect. Great." His fist curls, against his knowing. "I hate that... I can't not think about him." He could squeeze blood from that fist. He pulls her back, tenderly, against him, reclining against him. Like a lap, but safe from harm. She relaxes, and he's perfect. The world is big enough for all of it; her world is big enough for all of it. "You think about whatever you think about. It's okay." He makes a decision. "You're safe with me." She thinks about safety, closes her eyes; she breathes with the enormity of war. If only every part that we retrieve could feel so good.

Lafayette grins on camera, playing that bad boy black man role, living the face: take all that fear and loneliness and uncertainty and put it in me, like a possum. He wears a zippered hoodie like a TV rapper, he wears a golden trucker cap that dwarfs his head, he wears a ghetto fierceness that is not fabulous, but dangerous. All those layers, coming off one by one: put it in me. Whichever me I am to you.

"You motherfuckers're gonna have to be... patient. There's good things coming your way. This ain't Christmas morning, and you're all jacked up on --" he jerks his hips, topping the camera with his eyes, putting on a piece of his soul that lingers in the background usually "-- *caffeine*, ripping off that cheap WalMart paper to get your blender... No." He turns, revealing a shining golden thong, sparkly and cheap. The secret they wanted: here it is. He is a marketing genius; lots of creativity in this package. Watch them fall away. Behind him, the door opens as though of its own accord. "Whole lot of creativity went into this package and I want you to enjoy..."

"Whoa!" squeal Jason. "Back up the truck, man." Lafayette, who has more jobs than I do, is none too impressed with this interruption. "Don't fucking creep, bitch. You're fucking creeping. What the fuck you doing here?" He just wants more V. The part of Jason that registers appropriate behavior is all gone right now; his life is no longer an appropriate event. "I need you to run your ass out my goddamn doorway, because I'm fucking working." Jason stares, sweaty and dumb, forgetting this part of Lafayette, too edgy to be sexy. "Come on, buddy. I-I just need a little..." Lafayette recaps: how he said not to take too much and Jason wound up in the hospital, how he said to stay *schtum* about his source and he ran to

cousin Tara, how he got vamped up and fucking threw Andy across the yard. "You can't handle the shit, buddy." But it's handling him.

-- Page 5 --

"Look, I will pay however you want. I'll even show my wiener on your website." Lafayette tells him to take his "little stumpy white dick" and get the fuck up out his joint, and that's what he "wants." Jason starts getting weird, in that redneck way he always goes for, when he's cornered, which is straight-up white boy entitlement: "And what you gonna do? Hmm?" Lafayette dares him. "You gonna call the law?" Before he can do much more than get the minifridge open, Lafayette's got his arms behind his head. "Don't fucking fuck me, motherfucker. Hear me?" Jason submits. "Because I will fuck your ass up. You get me?" Lafayette throws him across the door, against the frame. "Get the fuck up out of here." One source down, and Jason can't even see the lesson he's being taught. "Aw, can you at least tell me where I can find some more?" Lafayette tells him honestly, as a guide will. "Go to the fucking morgue, because that's where you're going. Get the fuck outta here." Jason slinks away. "Bitch." Man, I really thought Jason would at least let him go downtown like one time on this little junkie journey, but that would damage Lafayette's character way more than poor Jason. We don't shit where we eat.

Well, sometimes we do. Bill opens his secret compartment, pushing open a clicking wall and showing her a ragged carpet, and the tiny place beneath it: "This is where I spend my days." Sookie asks if anybody ever gets in there with him: it looks tight. "This is not a place for you," he says. It's where he's dead. Every dawn he dies, and he's dead until dusk. "So we can never sleep beside each other," she says. The meridian. She belongs to the day; you can smell the sunlight on her skin. It's not about wearing white or anything like that: we live in a day world. She doesn't belong in his place of death. Sleep there, eat some pomegranate seeds, stay down there forever. And then they wouldn't love each other anymore, because they'd be dead together. Giving up the sun, even if she stayed human, is not an option. Consolation? "No one else knows where I rest." Not a bad trade, all things considered. He kisses her, and hilariously keeps his eyes on hers, super intense and silly, as he's lying down in his hidey-hole, in the cold ground. (*He is vampire!*) She's sorry to see him go, but once he's gone, with his creepy-funny googly eyes, she looks around the world with a new sense of herself. While he's dead she owns this house; while he's gone she owns the world. Without someone else in the room she can feel her soul, how it stretches out around her; the enormity of the world, and territory hard-earned. She owns this part of him, and of herself, and she's wearing his shirt, and the day has just begun.

-- Page 6 --

Lettie Mae Thornton pours herself some coffee. Sensible, at the beginning of the day. As the TV asks, quite seriously for once, exactly what it means to accept Jesus as your personal savior, Tara does the bills. "We'll write a check for the electric and put it in the water envelope then stick the check for the water bill in the electric envelope." Two possums, she's saying: two fears and hates, mix them up and toss them in the water. Lettie Mae pours vodka in her cup, down to the last drop. The mug is child-made and daughter-decorated: A cow, wearing a crown, celebrating its birthday under a childish scrawl: "Party!" Sad enough but there's sadness to spare. "They'll both think it was a mistake and call about it. Then we'll be in the clear for another month." And that's the possum secret right there, isn't it? You're only clear for a month at a time. The second you start thinking you're done, that you've solved it, that you're allowed to be happy, festive scarf around your neck, they

fucking come at you from a whole other angle. Our joy in reclaimed territory is only mania, doomed to pass and futile, but: it is still joy.

"I need four hundred and forty-five dollars," Lettie Mae says, wearing grey and a white, white robe, like a sacrifice. Like a baptism on the way. "No way, Mama. We are broke." Momma sits and sips at her coffee, reiterating that she needs it for her exorcism. "You *need* to do what normal people do. Stop drinking and go to AA meetings." Lettie Mae tells her that, as they both know and the demon too, that she's not exactly a "group person," and Tara asks if the demon's aware of her vodka-soaked coffee habit, which by the way is not fooling anybody. "I can't help it. The demon told me to finish off everything in the house today. It doesn't want me to get exorcised." Tara wonders if maybe Lettie Mae can get the demon to get a damn job. Lettie Mae says the most intelligent thing she's ever said: "The demon has a job. Going after people that are weak but still have faith." Which is to say: the living. Every single one of us.

"It's a jealous demon and knows how close I am to Jesus," says Lettie Mae, completely missing the point: "That's why it picked me." Tara is disgusted, but Lettie Mae comes down on her for taking the Lord's name in vain. Tara's sad; the demon moves in. "Tara, honey..." Lettie Mae leans forward, staring at the floor. Playing a complicated game, a war, of which we only see the most scenery-chewing fucked-up part. "I know I wasn't the best mother. I fucked up a lot and I'm sorry." Her face goes coon-cat mean, slippery, manipulative; Jason could learn a lesson just now: "I want to do this for the both of us. That's why I talked her down fifty dollars." Tara rolls her eyes, but all she's doing is spurring the demon on. "Please help me with this. Please." She sips at it: coffee bitter and hot, vodka cold as nails and kicking at the throat.

-- Page 7 --

"Mama. Put down that coffee and look at me." Not happening. "It's the demon drinking, not me..." she says, and Tara reaches for it, but her hands go crazy and she screams: the hot coffee spills itself all over her, scalding hot, ruining her pure white shirt and robe. She's dirty. She has become dirty. She sucks at it, from her shirt, holding fire-slicked hands to her mouth, sucking at them like a hungry thing, every last drop. The very drops of it, the demon wants. Tara shakes, near weeping; near falling on her knees. "It's the demon! It's the demon!" Tara cannot hold this inside herself.

Sookie comes home in Bill's shirt, holding her bridal, her sacrificial, her virgin garment in her arms and her panties and his shirt on her back. A new girl. She hears a succession of fumbling noises in the house that is hers. The killer is back. The killer always wears a mask, and you will never guess. It's always Jason when it matters: he comes stumbling out, with a paper shopping bag in one hand and silver candlesticks in the other. "Fuck," he whispers to himself, caught hungry-handed. "What are you doing?" she asks, but in his search to deflect blame his gaze falls upon her body, the territory of war. He is dirty, and she cannot be dirty. "You went ahead and did it, huh? My own sister. Nothing but a damn fangbanger. Now, you saved it all these years for a fucking vampire?" He thinks dirty is possible; he thinks "dirty" is something our bodies are capable of being. His most of all, and then everybody that reflects him. He looked right at Bartlett and never figured it out, because he lives in the daylight world where our histories are our faults, and we must ignore our history to say clean. He still doesn't know, when a monkey would know. He just knows where to assign it; who the possum must be for his ugly desire.

"Bill is a gentleman," she protests, and he answers, "He *bit* you." The thing Jason will never admit he wants most. "He doesn't hit me, which is more than I can say for you." Jason whines that he tried to apologize and she wouldn't let him, but that's because his offense was not what he was apologizing for: he wanted to say he was sorry for the slap, but she wanted him to apologize for Bartlett, and he can not know that, and she cannot tell him, so she changes the subject: "What are you doing with Gran's candlesticks?" He swallows and says, post-funeral, that he's just taking what's his, half of the world. "They were her *wedding present*. From her *mother*." Jason doesn't care: he needs the money. "For what?" The question you only ask when you know the answer; he's dirty. "You have a job. And a house." I like Jason's house, I like that when he was old enough he left the nest, and Sookie stayed home because she needed Gran, and was growing. And now they both have houses, and they have to live there. Among the memories and the pain. He tells her to fuck off, and she's not having it. That Alice/Sookie bending place I love so much more than anything else: "Uh-uh. Gran might have spoiled you rotten, but I won't. This is my house now. You put those things down and get out." He goes redneck again, blowing past her, and she grabs at the shopping bag; it rips and everything falls to the floor. Silverware, pearls, jewelry, cameos, memories. Disgusting. "You were gonna sell her jewelry?" All these memories. He runs away.

-- Page 8 --

Sam's brother-dog lies on the lawn outside the trailer, groaning softly and lying on its side, impatient with his mood. "Hey, dog!" Tara says joyfully, chuckling, and lets herself in, as is a man or woman's prerogative. Inside, Sam's worrying at the folding table that is part of his trailer's furnishings, with his opposable thumbs and all. It smacks him on the hand as she's coming in. "Goddamn son of a bitching shit-ass fucking trailer!" (In the shower the other day I let my mind wander as I often do and I thought about the Proust Questionnaire, and what is your favorite curse word. And I know that I would say "cocksucker" like everybody else, because it is awesome, but I can't say my real answer and maybe it's closer to "your favorite sound," and it's just that: random clichéd Tourette's yelling like that. So when he said that I was like, "Lipton, that is my most perfect music right there!" Like, once you look at it you have to laugh because what on Earth is a "bitching shit-ass fucking" anything? Or how can you do anything in a "son-of-a-bitching" manner? I love that. But I mean: "cocksucker." Undeniable.)

Sam bitches at her walking in on him, and she laughs, pretending to knock at the door retroactively. "Or you want me to call? 'Hi, Sam, it's me, the girl you've been fucking. Mind if I drop by to interrupt your cussing spell, say hi to you and your cute little dog?'" This is her demon. She's laughing, but watch out. You can be honest or you can be funny, but it's rare that you can do both in the same moment. And I should know! "Uh, yeah, I do mind?" Sam is, by the way, ten times hotter than he has ever been, which is ten times hotter than one single motherfucker has a right to be. "Last time I saw you, you left me high and dry in some fleabag motel in the middle of the night." She tries to say, but she can't say: too many demons between him -- the possibility he represents -- and the iron prison she finds herself into. The sunlight world of Sam, his infinite tenderness, and the darkling world of Momma's terror, thirty-some years in the making. Bring them together with your fists, you can't. Too many demons and fears and shames between.

"...That wasn't the first time. I don't have time for that kind of bullshit." She protests, to save time, that she doesn't want to "get something going" with her boss. It's the opposite of why, and how, but it's reflexive: a shield she learned from her mother (just watch) -- find

the powerlines, find the ickiness, and if you lay hands on it first it's yours to command. He reminded her he was his boss, and she laughed in his face. But he's getting close to the sparks now, and the demon won't have it, so she throws that in his face. "Then why the hell are you here? And it was your big idea to have sex, not mine." She tells him, rationally, not to act like he didn't want it, but her mistake was putting the job on the table, because it's what he's afraid of -- especially since Bill, with 150 years of authority, poked him with it.

-- Page 9 --

You give me this power and say you win? I'll show you authority. "I hired you after you got fired from every place!" And back to the sweet boy he is, 27 days out of the month: "Now you throw being your boss in my face? Don't treat me like I'm some kind of asshole!" We all just want to be seen. We all want to matter. We retreat to a place she can be honest: "Did you honestly think I'd sleep with you if I thought that?" She can say that without risking anything, because it's nice at the same time it's true, and the same time it's a reiteration of our territory: I wouldn't fuck you if you didn't matter, but I did, so don't tell me it didn't matter but especially don't tell me I don't matter when you say it, because you do, which means I do. It wasn't just sex. No ritual is empty.

"I have *no idea* what the fuck you think, Tara. But I'll tell you what I think: I think you better give me one good reason not to throw you out of right now." Barking at the lawn, at the postman: either you belong here or you motherfucking don't. Tell me now. She hears him, she hears it: this is real. This is one part where we're real. Your home, your life, and I invade like a demon, push you this way and that, like you're not a person. Like you don't have sovereignty over the united states of Sam, whatever they may be. "I'm no good at this..." she says. It's like bleeding for him. There are so many kinds of virginity. For something that's both biologically self-evident and culturally, hatefully constructed, we know it when we see it: "Try harder," he begs. And she does. Heart straining against body, heart speeding up, mind controlling that sovereign state, she speaks past the demon, past fear and history and standing firmly in her space: "...Sam. I'm sorry. I don't know how to be with somebody. I never..."

He looks at her, almost loves her. "Maybe I'm unboyfriendable," she says. Clever line, clever way to slice right through the shit. She's naming the demon. Once you name it the war can begin. He nods, almost guilty. "Naw, I'm just in a shitty mood." She doesn't move, except her eyes, and you have to listen: "Because of me? I don't want that." The sweetest thing she ever said: I don't want your pain to be coming from here; I want to be what we are. I want to be home, even for a moment: just like Heaven, for just a moment.

"No, it's not you. It's just... This trailer's falling down around me!" Happens; happening right before your eyes, if you knew her tells. "Well, at least you're not living with your mother." She opens the door to the demon: "Hey, do your folks ever ask you for money for some stupid ass shit they dreamed up that you think is crazy?" He reiterates that his family's not close, and slides back under the table. "You need a Robertson screwdriver," she says, peeking. A house is never simple; even a motel room is home, for a moment. "How would you know something like that?" he laughs, as though there are things Tara Thornton can't do. Have you learned nothing? "No daddy and a drunk mom? All the fixing fell to me." She looks around at the place as though it's real, for the first time: as though it's home. Home for somebody, home for a man with a heart; not some kind of asshole. They want to lay claim to that territory and neither of them can say okay. He grins. "Place would look good with a... With a little work..." For a moment, in the sun, he could love her. She meets

his eyes, in a house that could be home for them, for just a moment. Sometimes it's just a moment: does that make it any less real? She's all about territory, in a way Sookie's only learning: get her hands on it, touch it, make it work, make it beautiful, burn off what doesn't work. Something they can share. There's a reason they call it making love. They lock eyes, and the phone rings. The demon. "Hello? Speaking, who is this?" Sam can smell fear: "What?"

-- Page 10 --

Mr. Gus Bankerman apologizes to Lettie Mae: it's against bank policy to extend a loan for an exorcism. She looks, of course, totally nuts, even as she's leveling with him: "We both know what's going on here. You won't give me a loan because you're a bigot." Do what? Okay, when you're powerless -- which is to say, when you *perceive* yourself as powerless, whether or not you're correct, which in this case is not realistic but often is -- you do the junkie thing. As a wildly addicted addict, she's going to play the card, and it's not a black thing -- as she's about to demonstrate, with her code-switching ass, it's nothing to do with that -- but a hungry human thing, which means whatever you've got to play, or think you can, you will. It is embarrassing more than anything, that consideration of angles: what she's saying is, she'll show her wiener on your webcam.

"Oh, uh, many of our clients are African-American..." says the white man, and she pushes: "You *saying* that just proves my point. I ain't talking about the color of my skin, but you is." Whatever you've got. "Well, now that is simply not the case. We have recently accepted a client who is a Vampire-American..." But of course Lettie Mae doesn't give a fuck what subprime motherfucker is getting loans if their name isn't Lettie Mae Thornton, broke-ass black lady Christian, possessed fuckup, and general menace: "You are prejudiced against me because I am a Christian!" He protests that he teaches Sunday School, and she switches the script again, jumping up and screaming: "Uh-huh. Then you know what I'm talking about! The whole world is against us, they even try and take away Christmas. This is your chance to stop that persecution in its tracks. Show Jesus you have a charitable nature." Show Jesus you have a charitable nature. Without a blade to your throat or a madwoman in your face. Understand the translation of need to words, show that you can love. And his answer? "Well, a bank is not a charity." Which is true, and which is honorable, but his joy in having wriggled out of her web of not-so-hard-to-figure bullshit? Not so much.

"Maybe Mister Gus just don't like women, is that it?" Christ no! She comes around the desk, scaring both the bejesus and the regular-Jesus out of him: "Then let's you and me work something out. My landlord don't mind if a get a little *behind* in my rent..." And wow because that is not what he was going for. Just as he's begging to terminate this convo, and she's screaming, "There may be snow on the mountaintop, but there's fire in the valley!" Tara walks in. "This white devil tried to sexual harass me!" That would be that demon talking, I think. "I'm gonna sue his narrow ass!" Everybody stares; he tries to make good, but no. No ritual is empty.

-- Page 11 --

Tara goggles, almost crying: "What are you doing here?" Um, duh. What she's trying to do is borrow money, because of her unfortunate habit of having a daughter who wants her to live with a demon all up inside her. "I can feel it in me right now! Nobody believes me!" Shaking, jerking. "I do not want to live like this no more!" Tara is scared to death, close to tears. So much closer to her own initiation. "I can't!" Tara's lips shake, with love and something

more. She walks her mother back home, like a crooked house, like a broken building. "I gotta go lay down," Lettie Mae says. "That demon's gnawing at me something awful." Tara sends her to drink and turns on the sink so she won't hear the tickling sound of a box of Brillo pads and the cash she keeps hidden there, like the child of some kind of damned alcoholic.

Sookie's running food in an adorable green-and-white scarf, like the first day of spring, bouncing and grinning; Sam sees Royce and his rednecks enter and strikes a casual pose, watching Lafayette to see what he'll do. Of course, Lafayette takes off his earrings and nails again, because it's time to fuck them up, but Sam stops him. "Whoa whoa whoa, I'm paying you to cook, not beat on customers." Lafayette says, then, he wants a motherfucking raise, which ... Is not how employment works exactly, and Sam tells him to pull it together because they're getting busy. Terry relates Tara's message, which is that she's calling in sick with demon possession, and Sam whines for a second before Sookie hopscoches joyfully over all his worries and tells him they'll work it out. Lafayette notices that certain bounce in her step that means something it's never meant before, and giggles. "Well goddamn! Look at you, all pornalicious. What kind of crazy mix you done got yourself into?" Sookie's smile is blinding and manic. "Can't I just be in a good mood without it being a big deal? It's a pretty night outside, and I'm glad to be enjoying it with my friends!" Like, who says that? The part of her self that she got back. Lafayette nods.

Randi Sue's in the Merlotte's phone booth, looking whorish and desperate, calling Jason and saying shit like, "It's Randi Suuuuuuuue. Like you don't knnnnnnow." Jason's more interested in changing clothes and popping a slice of pizza in his mouth, because he is a total junkie freak and he's taking his wiener where it can buy him something. Randi Sue notes the blank, distracted disinterest in his voice, which is so different from the usual blank distraction that is his lot -- on those occasions, of course, he's not already busy weeping while you fuck him. He tells Randi Sue that his hot self and a beer for her are not forthcoming, because he's going to Shreveport. She asks to come along, and he couldn't care less, and mentions that he's "thinking of" going to Fangtasia! and is that something she'd be interested in. And it's funny, because the first few episodes this was Jason's life: find a girl, turns out she's a fangbanger, and all we know about Randi Sue is that's just her luck now. First Hoyt and now Jason, who can't even be bothered to hang up when she starts screaming. "Uh-uh. I may not know much, but I do know better than to associate myself with people of low moral character!" she says, rearranging her desperate breasts and remembering that time she got fucked doggy-style in a pile of garbage, and how classy that was.

-- Page 12 --

Over in the kitchen, Terry shares a private joke with Lafayette: the spoon in the soup that's going to Royce, heated over an open flame. Sookie's giggly and funny, complimenting Arlene's hair -- which to be fair does look particularly cute, in a *Saving Grace* kind of way -- and she squeals about how the scarf around her neck, hiding the mark she gave herself to take away the marks she didn't, is "double cute." Which is, after all, exactly what it is: it's cute because it's cute, and it's double cute because it means she's free. "There's something different about you. You need to tell me what is going on." She searches Sookie's face and gasps. "...Is it a man?" Sookie pulls back on the reins a bit, and says she's not comfortable discussing her personal business, especially at work, where everybody wants inside. "Well? Everyone else's personal life is open to you," Arlene laughs, in a dorky and loveable way, and demonstrates her moral fiber: "I forgive you because I know you can't help that, but it

does make being your friend kinda lopsided..." Or does it? We're all books that take a moment to read; her mouth drops open. "Please tell me it was Sam, not that vampire!" But the girl is gone: "Yes! It was Bill! And I think I might be in love with him! Don't tell anybody!" Um, have you met my friend Arlene? She works fast. Royce throws the red-hot spoon to the floor, and Lafayette grins: "Sook, order up."

Arlene runs straight to Rene with the news, but he just blows her off. I wonder if she's told him about the baby yet: "Oh, my Lord! Suppose she gets pregnant, how in the world can she nurse a baby with fangs?" Sam's not happy about any of this. Not happy at all. But Rene is his usual level-headed, normal, supportive and caring self: "Uh, you just be her friend. She need one now more than ever."

Sookie babbles at a customer about the okra special, and as she's turning over an order to Sam, he jumps at her like a beast, ripping the scarf off. Marked. "Hey! You keep your hands to yourself, Sam Merlotte. You have no right to touch me!" He tells her she's stupid, and the bar goes quiet. "What I do on my own time is no concern of yours. Or any of y'all's," she shouts at the patrons. "Yes, I had sex with Bill, and since every one of y'all's too chicken to ask, it was great! I enjoyed every second of it! And if you don't like that, you can just fire me," she grunts at him, shoving her tray into his chest. Lafayette is loving it, the crowd does that talk-show *ooh, Sam realizes he's fucked up, Sookie still doesn't understand that she's signed her own death warrant for the tenth time, Rene drinks his beer, Arlene stares.*

-- Page 13 --

As Jason walks toward Fangtasia!, a truly hilarious conversation is happening in the parking lot. One dude is all, "I'm gonna bite you, I'm really gonna bite you," and the other guy is like, "That's totally what I want!" Is there anything weirder than when people start talking like a porno? I hate that so much; it's like, sex and porn are similar but one of them is actually happening and why would you put yourself inside the movie when sex is actually happening. They are homonyms but they are not the same thing, and Jason's still working that one out. He shivers and smiles at Pam, who looks at him like an old dead thing. "Your mama know you're out in the big city?" He admits his Mama's dead: "So am I." Jason, he does not know what to do with that. "Lemme see some ID," she continues, and he hands over his card. "Jason Stackhouse? From Bon Temps?" You're in my vault. "You related to Sookie, by any chance?" He's the brother, yeah. Wait, Jason asks, how does she even know Sookie. "She stands out. Do you?" Oh, Jason. He shakes his head because he knows what Pam means, but then gets his feet under him again: "Maybe? Uh, in other ways." I would love to know what he thinks his mutant power is. Not ever listening to very good advice? Sliding through on charm and those sick obliques? Using his body as a weapon against himself? What a useful fucking power that is.

Pam asks why he's there, and he acts like a total fucking junkie, jerking and staring at the gay fangbanger porno happening in the parking lot to demonstrate his open-mindedness. She locks eyes with him and something turns on behind them. He stares, fascinated. "Tell me why you came here." He nods. "I want some vampire blood." She cocks an eyebrow at him, offended. "What time do you get off work?" he asks, with the sweetest smile. God, Jason Stackhouse is the reason [Jordan Catalano](#) never learned to read. "You came for my blood?" She nods, and says the saddest, saddest thing: "Yes, you're right. You're nothing like your sister." Disappointed in him, like as a person, she pops her teeth out and welcomes him in, refusing to move out of his way. "And good luck getting out," she whispers in his ear.

When we talk about sacrifice what we're talking about is the fact that there are things moving in the deep; leviathans and strange angels, older than time, twisting in the water. You can feel them when they move past you, or through you. You can even talk to them, make deals with them, because they're implicit in the sparks that light your skin up. You give them something, your pain or your blood or your pleasure, and they pay you back in power. Their passage deforms the universe, like Einsteinian ripples in the fabric and curves in dimensions you can't see -- but you can feel it. My favorite description of them, the archetypes or Gods or characters in your dreams, whatever you want to call them, is Lynda Barry's: "And in my dream there was a creature. Not too friendly, not too mean. He closed my eyes and opened them." And of all the other things vampires signify, in this story, you must never forget that they are part of that deep magic: every one of them a leviathan, full of blood and demons and magic. So while Jason just made a serious social *faux pas*, an error in judgment during a specific time of political turmoil, he also just brushed past something that might as well be God's less lovely face.

-- Page 14 --

And then there are the deals you don't even know you're making. Bartlett takes the garbage out, in his wheelchair, down a ramp outside a broken-down, ramshackle, sad little house. His broken, fucked up, worthless life. It's a lot easier to hate a pedophile than to feel bad for one, but that doesn't mean you can't do both. I mean, he's useless. There is nothing to his sad life. He is the difference between compulsion and following through, and he deserves what he's about to get, but it's still sad. He was a kid once. Probably a kid that got fucked with in his time. And now he's old and gross and lives in a wheelchair and inches his old painful way up that ramp and inch at a time and nobody likes him because he's a fuckwad. He sees Bill standing at the top of the ramp and his hands leave the wheels of their own accord: he rolls back. Into Bill's arms. "I'm not here for money," Bill says. "I'm here for Sookie." I mean to say that he reclines back against Bill, like a girl in a bathtub, like a girl on her uncle's knee, and Bill bites him. And all that care and worry and sadness and history flows out, into the sacrifice. All magic is substitution magic.

Tara bitches about the mosquitos, but Lettie Mae is telling truths she doesn't even know: "You want to meet the devil, you wait at the crossroad. For Miss Jeanette, you gotta go past where the devil's at." The only way out is through. "You're getting as bad off as Lafayette and his juju," Tara says -- and it's interesting that the Haunted Kernbread made an appearance in the Previouslies this week, don't you find? -- which Lettie Mae takes, as they always fucking do, the opportunity to "pity" her sister for "having to raise a sexual deviant," bless her heart. "That runs in families, you know. Like demons." Oy with the demons already. But she's not wrong: Jason and Sookie are the two halves of a very sad, very long history. Pain runs in families too.

And oh, Miss Jeanette. She's running full-tilt at the line between male and female on an opposite and equal vector to Lafayette: she's a witch, a wizard, a hobbling crone, a beautiful girl. Hairless, in a witch's robes, carrying the Hermit's lantern. He's like this. In the background is a wasteland: just beyond the wasteland is a mountain range. Diogenes the Cynic walked the earth day and night, barking like a dog, with his lantern bright even in daylight, looking for an honest man. It was more important to tell the truth than to stay sane. The Hermit is the old woman who gives us the maps and weapons for our journey.

-- Page 15 --

By cross-sums she is woven with the Moon, who stands at the threshold of the darkness and churns the waters. But every guardian of a threshold is also an obstacle, don't forget: from one angle a strange angel guiding you to Heaven, and from another something dark and terrifying. Until you learn to tell the truth; until you learn your true name. In the old days, three men with animals' heads would come into your tent and rip you into pieces, put you back together with a diamond in your head. Now, see: Sookie and Bill and Jason and Amy and Lafayette and Tara and Sam are making new ways of doing it, new recipes and new rituals. The Hermit is the moment in which we're given time to obey the Oracle's only demand, γνῶθι σαυτόν, and the way that truth rips itself through your skin and your bones and never, ever stops.

"You showed up. I figured that demon of yours wouldn't let you. You must be Tara. I'm Miss Jeanette. You ready? Fully prepared body and soul for this exorcism?" If we do this, we did this. "I didn't eat anything all day, like you said." And has she made her peace? Tara stares at Miss Jeanette, and her mother asking if it's going to hurt. "Of course it's gonna hurt. It's like childbirth. Except the demon don't want to come out, and it ain't your body that could get ripped up, it's your soul." She is so beautiful it's distracting; she is so crooked and broken and strong. Tara is scared. "In the olden days, folks paid my grandmamma using tobacco and livestock. But today it's cash. In advance." Tara takes it out of her purse, scared to touch her, and hands her the money under a full silver moon. "That demon will not inhabit you after tonight," Jeanette swears, and puts the money in her purse. "Let's get this shit over with," Tara says, earning herself a look from those eyes, deep and deeper, before Miss Jeanette leads the way through the forest with her lantern, through the dark passages, on crooked legs, to a bus. Inside, it's all bones and stones and living leaves of ivy, dead things and alive, no boundaries between the inside and the outside, because nature's all we have. Lettie Mae undresses in the candlelight, before the eyes of long-dead skulls.

"It felt like every single care or worry or sadness I ever had was just flowing out of me, into him," Sookie explains to Lafayette. "And yeah, that hurt at first. But then when I relaxed, didn't hurt at all." He admits he is impressed. "I was always too scared to let 'em bite me..." He gets serious and looks into her eyes, leveling. "I don't know, Sook. I just think that when there's blood involved, a line been crossed." Crossed, recrossed, redrawn into a free nation of one. Just like Heaven. "Oh, I definitely crossed a line... But I'm glad I did!" she wiggles cutely, daring herself to play Lafayette's games, the hip and the look. "Well, you go ahead on cooking with your bad ass. Good for you. It ain't possible to live unless you're crossing somebody's line," he says. She giggles and runs off, as Sam stares sullen and sad, and Lafayette smiles to himself. "Skank."

-- Page 16 --

A girl wearing a Fangatasia!-brand t-shirt approaches Eric, who's busily texting or something. She's terrified. Long Shadow is behind her and she doesn't even know it. Eric gives her leave to take a picture, and Long Shadow immediately confiscates and smashes her phone. "No pictures." She's confused, that's not fair. "I did not say you could keep it," he smiles, and Long Shadow laughs. This is what fate does to you: says "take a picture" and smashes your camera. They're leviathans. Jason watches the go-go dancers, remarking on the boy one's moves. "Can I get you another?" Long Shadow asks, and he starts to get himself into trouble. A girl in a soft, long hippie dress with a scarf around her forehead, Amy Burley, recognizes the trouble immediately, and takes a position nearby in case he goes too far.

"Not Tru-Blood, but really strong. You know what I'm sayin'?" Long Shadow better not. "We've got Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey. Hundred proof. It'll turn the lining right off your stomach." Not really. "Somethin' stronger than that?" Amy rolls her eyes. "But you know, a different color?" Pissy Long Shadow is so much funnier and more appealing than any other kind: "Just tell me what the fuck you want, little boy." He's down to asking for "something closer to the color of the walls in here" when she finally drags him away from the bar. He's sweating, she can tell what it is, but he says the word again: "V." She tries to shut him up, he's not getting it, she finally whispers, grabbing his face: "Listen, they can hear really well, alright? So let's talk about it later. Let's get out of here before you get us both killed." Have you met Jason Stackhouse? Getting it is not in his wheelhouse: "I ain't going nowhere until I get what I came for." She taps her purse, amazed at how dumb his stubbornness and hunger have made him.

(*What kind of stupid bitch would go and do something like that?*) Royce thinks, and Sookie asks him what he means. "Fuck a vampire," he answers. I love how the simple fact of admitting her power has turned the tables. Nobody can tell her to stay out of their heads because she can't, but it's obvious now that she's not fucking around, so she's like this roving lie detector, a Diogenes with her lamp, looking for the truth. "Fuck a vampire? Hell, no. I like my meat alive!" The rednecks laugh, but their opposite numbers choose that moment to enter Merlotte's, scaring Arlene. Liam does the tongue thing, and Malcolm prisses around, and Diane climbs all over a kid in one of the booths.

-- Page 17 --

At this very moment, several things are happening: vampires descend finally on Merlotte's, offering themselves up to anger and hatred. Death by fire, death by hubris: Amy is whisking Jason away from his death, and Bill is taking a body out of his trunk, like a possum in a cage. Death by water. And the possum in the bus whisks its tail about, smelling fear on Tara's skin, and the bitter, blunted, squatting smell of demon on Lettie Mae. If you ever admitted how many times in a day you put your life in strangers' hands, you would never leave the house again.

"Get us three TruBloods," Malcolm orders Sam, who tells him to vacate, it's a family place for locals only. "Well, we just closed on a place up the road, so that makes us official citizens of Renard Parish." Arlene and Terry stare at them; young leviathans, stretching new muscles, proud and stupid. "We're the new locals. Discrimination against vampires is punishable by law in the great State of Louisiana. Personally, I don't give a fuck. But I am thirsty." God, he's hard to take. The thing about the big stuff is that you can't even talk about it, because it's too big for words, which is why metaphors were invented. Except that also applies to TV shows, which is to say that you have to supply your own fear and menace and *gravitas* and glamour to the vampires, because mostly they're just kind of dorky.

When Sam uninvites them, Diane laughs from on top of that kid: "That shit only works in a private home." Malcolm gasps, having finally noticed Sookie standing there with her mouth open, and he and Diane advance on her. "You are looking delectable as always!" Sam's grossed out that she knows them, but it's clear she has less-than-friendly feelings towards them. Malcolm gasps again when he sees the marks on her skin. "It looks like little Miss Holdout has given up the goods!*Brava!*" She informs them, in no uncertain terms, that she is "his," which spooks Sam something fierce. Everything has its uses, even that, but not this time. Malcolm pops his teeth out and comes after her, because Bill's not around. Bill hears her fear, drops the body in the lake, and gets all zoomy.

"Don't you think for one second I'd ever have anything to do with you!" she shouts, shoving him away, unafraid and unglamoured. "You were trash while you were alive, and now you're just dead trash!" I love you, Sookie Stackhouse. "I'm gonna drain you so slowly, you're gonna beg me to kill you," he says, because gentility is his total thing and she totally insulted it. On an unrelated note, Terry comes flying out of nowhere having had some kind of Iraq-related break with reality, screaming "Jihad this, motherfucker!" and getting himself tossed through the air. Sam breaks a pool cue over his knee, creating a stake, which is like so offensive to do in front of a vampire. Once again, Malcolm's delicate sensibilities are being trampled! "You are a dead man!" Sam doesn't care exactly, but a second later Liam's got him pinned to the bar, choking him and offering to "reach down [his] throat and yank [him] inside-out by [his] dick." Which normally would be like a metaphor or a euphemism or an empty threat, but one of the more-awesome, less-talked-about abilities of vampires is that they can actually, literally pull you inside-out by your dick. It's due to their vampire strength.

-- Page 18 --

Bill appears and hollers at them to quit it, and Liam immediately lets up on dear old Sam. "You're here for me, not them," he grits, and they all kinda nod. These poor old assholes, I mean seriously. You have eternity to realize that you're not that interesting and you need a cruise director, or somebody to order you around. No wonder Eric's so bored all the damn time. "You never call me back!" Malcolm whines. "Now, if I remembered what feelings were, mine might be hurt." Diane, as usual, crawls around all over Bill's face and tries to be sexy; Liam's like, "Mainstreamin's for pussies!" As long as you're getting your personalities off the rack, you three, you couldn't have picked something with a little more flavor? Ugh. Anyway, Bill locks eyes with Sookie and agrees to go away with them, and it's super embarrassing because she tells him he's different and better than them, and he screams, "I am vampire!" For real.

Jason's filling up his tank and is all about "let's do your drugs right now," which if you thought about it for five seconds you would have already known he's That Guy, obviously, completely separate from the jonesing: That "You're so funny and so pretty and we're such good friends and where are the drugs do you have the drugs can I look at the drugs what are we waiting for SnausagesSnausagesSnausagesSnausages" Guy. She starts in with this teahouse pussy philosophy about how you have to think about the sunrise or some shit and feel all relaxed and like a limpid pool of sensations and cosmic thoughts. He shoots her that look and hits on her for a sec so she will give him some drugs. No dice. Because now she has to geek out on the semiotics of his authentic experience of being Louisiana trash for one thousand years and make poststructuralist love to his so very authentic pickup truck and when Amy Burley says she's from Connecticut, well, let's just say your first response is not to fall over from shock. She totally calls him out for being a day laborer, and he throws a bit of mystery on himself by claiming to be a "leg doctor." An M.D. in "leg." Jason Stackhouse, I adore you. Finally he's like, "ANYWAY WHERE ARE THE DRUGS," and when they drive away she authentically goes, "Yee-haw!"

Jeanette anoints Lettie Mae with oils and poultices, places stones on her heart, her belly, everywhere. Finally Tara asks where she learned to do this, and she explains. "I learned from my mama. And she learned from hers and so on, going back a thousand years. Now, we're gonna lure this demon out and then..." Tara shakes her head, snotting it up. "With a bunch of rocks? Uh-huh. Don't you need a Ouija board and some chicken bones?" Lettie Mae, in her bra and control-top panties, covered in magic rocks and staring up at like a raccoon

penis bone or snake face or whatever's horrible, is fucking exhausted. She's like, "Tara. Shut up." Tara complains that it's her money and Lettie Mae's like, "It's my demon!"

-- Page 19 --

"Look. I know you love your daughter. And I know you love your Momma, or else you wouldn't be here. But this is a serious situation for all of us. Demons can kill. And this one will, given half a chance." Tara's like, Oh hell no, and Miss Jeanette shows her fire: "Y'all need to calm down." Tara sits down, shoved there by her eyes, quaking. Miss Jeanette lifts the largest stone. "The sacred crone-stone. It's been in my family since Africa. My generation was twelve kids, but the stone chose me." She walks across her crooked house, and takes a sack off the possum's cage. Tara freaks out on her, thinking the possum is going to be added to the quickly growing pile of things stacked on her mom.

"-- Soon as that demon leaves your mother, it'll be looking for a new place to stay." She shoves her back down again. "Come on. We're all gonna have to be still. Don't even breathe. Let it find the possum." She moves her hands along Lettie Mae's spirit, feelings its angles and its topography, the country she once owned. Lettie Mae gasps when Jeanette puts the stone on the demon, and breathes through it. Jeanette takes up her black drum and begins to sing.

*Sing a crone-stone song  
Sing what land made me  
Dream-tinker is my drum  
I hold the power of the stone  
The water, the leaf, the dirt  
Stone, water, leaf, dirt*

Lettie Mae starts to jump, and jerk; it hears and it crawls up from the dark below her skin as the rhythm of the crone song stirs in them all, under the silver full moon: maiden, mother. Beautiful crone. And the demon, and the sacrifice.

*Sing a demon song  
Sing the night that made you  
Dark and wet, hungry and cold  
Trapped in darkness forever  
Lonely for the light  
You are safe here*

*Safe, safe*

*Safe and welcome  
By the power of the stone  
I bid you depart  
And join the world of light!*

The world is full of strange sounds, screams and cries, as Jeanette sings to the demon in its own language, shouting at the darkness; the possum begins to jump and squeal, and she puts its cage into a tub, holding it down as it struggles. And all that pain and care and worry flowed out, from me to him. She takes up her cane and pushes it down like Betty Davis with Narek and waits for it to go as Tara shakes her head terrified. Sing the night that made you.

Terry weeps, in the stockroom. All you want is to be seen: to matter. To mean something, to be more than a meaningless and broken object, oughtta-be-locked-up, crazy-running-through-the-night when it gets too big to hold. All you want is to do the thing that you do, and you can't do that: what's sadder than that? What demon took his territory from him? "I froze up. I let everybody down. I didn't do nothing." He shivers; Arlene puts out a hand to comfort him, and he jerks away. "This ain't Baghdad, Terry." He reaches for the hand he just jerked away from, and shakes with it. "It's Merlotte's, okay? Ain't nothin' anybody coulda' done." Not good enough. Sing the night that made you: "I'm supposed to." He weeps, and she shakes her head and hums to him, shushing away the pain and the fear, down back under the water.

"I know where that house they bought is at," Royce says, still hefting his pool cue like he did something. But he didn't do anything: he froze up, let everybody down. So now he has to go after them, to make it right. Sing the night that made you. "If you think you can sneak up on a vampire, then y'all are dumber in the head than a hog is in the butt," Sookie says. I remain unconvinced by the imagery in this case; plus, I think Royce is a total hottie and I don't want him to be eaten anytime soon. "Fucking a vampire don't make you no expert," one of the rednecks says, and Royce nods: "You're contaminated from normal people." That sentence? Makes no sense, literally. You know what he means, but come on, Royce. Her every moment is contaminated by normal people, but that's not what he meant. He is a dummy. Maybe it's Royce's authenticity I'm so very into. "What would you know about normal people?" They don't fuck dead things, for one. Nice burn! "You mess with Bill Compton, I promise, you will be a dead thing," she says, and takes off. Apparently having missed the part where she just, Natasha Lyonne-like, threatened to have sex with his corpse.

Sookie stupidly goes to Sam for help defusing the lynch mob (of three morons), but he is all about it. Even Arlene, still shaken from what they did and what happened next, the tears in Terry's eyes, says she hopes Royce kills them all. Sookie explains that the leaving with them part was a smokescreen, obviously, and Sam's like, "Doesn't matter. He belongs with his own kind." Sookie is, as usual, appalled by the racist rhetoric, and Sam's like, "Whatever, do what you want, but I don't want him here." (*Weren't for the little Stackhouse bitch, there wouldn't be no vampires coming around here at all. Round 'em all up at daybreak and shoot the sunlight into 'em...*) Sookie's all OMG for about a million years more.

Get this shit right here: "I went to Wellesley. I was supposed to do pre-law, but I said screw it and I studied philosophy instead. And that pissed the parental units off bigtime. As if the meaning of life's just irrelevant, right?" Amy, you dickhole. Jason's like, "I got two years at Vo-Tech, studying ... landscape technology." (You know what's closer to the meaning of life than philosophy? Landscape technology. Diogenes said that we should all just act like Jason Stackhouse all the time and everything would be okay. True story. Then, he jacked off in the *agora*, which is old-timey for *mall*.)

"I couldn't take anymore of that artificial lockjaw lifestyle, so I hit the road." Jason of course thinks of rabies in this context, because he's authentically retarded, and she explains Connecticut Lockjaw to him, lighting a candle. "Amy, please tell me you're not having sex with that *disgusting man*." It's hilarious, because literally everything -- even the metric

tons of bullshit here -- that comes out of Lizzy Caplan is hilarious, because she is a real-life wizard from Hogwarts. "People who talk that way around here don't want anyone to know they got their teeth knocked out," Jason authentics all over himself, and she's like, time to set the mood. Candles and Sarah McLachlan or some shit, I knew it. Fuck a buncha wanna-Blessed-Be bullshit. Nowadays every girl with a henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she's a sister of the Dark Ones. "Where are your CDs?" she asks -- like people have CDs! I'm so sure! -- and he's like WHERE ARE THE DRUGS and she's all, "your space here is so unselfconscious, so off the grid, your parents being dead is so authentic, I love history because things are so fucked up now, and if you get me drunk or coked up at a party I will start talking about Armageddon, Ragnarok, 2012, Terrence McKenna, anything to imagine the relief of the world ending, no more worries and no more trying to figure out if I'm a grownup yet" and he's like WHERE THE DRUGS AT and she's like, "Your parents are part of Gaia, do you know what Gaia is?" He's like, "Totally. That's when I show my wiener on the webcam."

It's either the Cowboy Junkies album or the *Natural Born Killers* soundtrack, I'm guessing the latter since you physically cannot put an Alabama Thunderpussy CD on the same shelf with a Cowboy Junkies CD, but either way: "Sweet Jane." She's waiting in the alley for her drug connection to come, and thinking of ways to get back home. It's all we're ever doing.

-- Page 22 --

"The Earth is a living organism... Makes weather, which is good for us... Plants give us the chemicals we need." He focuses on her, finally: he knows she's right about this, he's felt it, it's what he wants. It's what the V relates to him, every time: that all we are is nature, connected and full of life, God kissing herself like holy palmer's kiss, and he nods. That purity is a failed concept and a broken machine, which means we are all pure. "Everything is connected. But you know that." He nods, and begins to talk. About Sookie, his parents, and the movements of leviathans, changing the world below its skin. Talking about Adele, finally.

"Yeah... I don't like how they keep taking stuff away. Like Pluto's not a planet anymore and a brontosaurus stopped being a dinosaur." Amy is taken with his folksy wisdom; she doesn't notice him explaining this entire show, and story: "You can't say something stopped being what it's always been." Because that, too, is the ending of the world: the sun comes up on something different.

"Do you live by yourself?" He nods, and makes a sad, funny face: "Come on, let's do the V!" She assumes the posture of guide, tarot reader, but she's not a guide: it's in the eyes. She's just a girl whose world has ended, who thought herself into Armageddon with that powerful, flexing muscle of her brain, and thinks this is how you put it back together. Thinks that because it feels good, it must be the answer. The only way out is through, but making a religion of your addiction like this, it's saying: The only way out is to never leave. See, this is why I don't date boys like this because instead of Sarah McLachlan it's Sigur Rós, and I'm sorry but when I say "what language is this" and you say "it's made up language" you better be talking about Cirque de Soleil or some shit because if you're going to get that gay that fast you might as well go all the way.

"So the blood it carries oxygen to our organs, right? And that's what makes them function. So it keeps us going. It's like gas in a car engine." She lays out her works, her mortar and pestle, her flat scrying mirror, athame and vial full of blood. "Vampires, they don't need

oxygen. Everything just runs directly off the blood." Jason nods, comparing it to "those cars that run on corn," and she smiles, noting that the blood is old, so she's gotta take some simple chemistry steps to keep it from coagulating. "*Co-ag-u-lating*," Jason says quietly to himself, because he is totally adorable. She puts two large tablets of aspirin in the mortar; he is drawn in by the sight of the blood as she puts one little drop on each. "You just know this is what Holy Communion is symbolic of. This is the real deal here. None of that lame-ass empty ritual." No ritual is empty. She grinds the pills against the stone, crushing them for the spell. It's relatively pomo, I'll give her that, but she's just aping the empty rituals before the empty rituals she's making fun of. If you you're your connection to the symbols and start wanting the "real deal," you are in danger, because the point of metaphors is to catch the leviathan gliding by, and to say, "This is what that felt like, translated through another dimension," and touching the real thing -- instead of its shadow, or marking its movement -- is how you get possessed in the first place. All magic is substitution magic, because we can't afford to get our hands dirty.

-- Page 23 --

"This is nature's greatest gift," Amy says, which is bullshit but Jason's kind of bullshit, and Jason's like, "I thought they'd get all mushy!" Heh. She scrapes the powder out onto her black mirror, two red bumps. "See, the V adapts. It wants to be in us." He gets excited, but she starts all that made-up kludged together Amy Religion stuff again. "We honor Gaia and seek the deepest relationship to her..." To be whole. She says "Gaia" and it means "everything at once," without fear and without division: She's asking to be whole. She thinks drugs will do it. Amy makes me sad. She looks at him expectantly: "Oh yeah, uh, me, too. And Pluto can start being a planet again, connected to stuff." Just like Heaven.

"By taking the blood of the night into our bodies, we water the flowers of our souls..." Jason's had it, and I mean word, but she looks at him and steals another line: "Nothing is real. Everything is permitted." Saying that to Jason Stackhouse -- even if he doesn't know where it comes from or what it does -- is like handing a toddler a live grenade. He's still not onboard the "some things are real, some things are uncool to do" train, and you kind of have to ride that basic train before you start blowing your mind with that stuff. He nods, and she does a line, loses focus immediately. He takes the other rail and she watches as he's overcome. The world is so much with him, when it's with him. As bad as it's obviously going to get, it's almost worth it to see that look on his face every time. Like he's just realized he's not dreaming, and things really are this good. She smiles and watches him breathe it in; the sound of nature, no inside and no outside, nothing but life. Love, Love, Love. She is like the moon: one face somber and the other sweet; a third with a giant smile, as she leans in to kiss his mouth.

Sookie's mental link with Bill not doing the trick, she tries the cell but just gets voicemail: "Damn it, Bill... Bill, this is the third time I've called. A lynch mob is going after those vampires. You gotta get out of there. Call me back. Now." Not after this new country he showed her, not on the morning of the first day in this new world. Not after all the journeying they have yet to do, across those landscapes and in those depths.

Jason sits on his bed, with his shirt off, looking at his hand. The mirror on the closet door is made for visions and for dreams: he sits in a forest, dappled with sunlight, in a Heaven he can reach any time; no division between inside and outside. He is lit by the sun: Pluto, coming home. His amazed face as he whirls around to see if it's real, to get the real deal, to leapfrog the metaphor and catch a ride with angels, but it's just a bedroom. Authentic,

unself-conscious. She climbs onto the bed behind him; her hand on his shoulder feels like heaven. She kisses his neck and he falls back into it, then onto his back. This is the first time Jason Stackhouse has ever had sex. The body, the skin, the way it doesn't constrict itself down to one point -- that you talk to like it's a person -- he never knew that. Not even on V with Randi Sue behind Merlotte's, it was still about fucking. But this is something different. And again: no matter how it goes south, I think it's great he's finally getting properly laid. It's Pluto, coming home to new territory he never knew he had. He can feel his body. She holds out one hand, and he meets it, and where they touch there is pleasure, and light. It's no time for war: just sparks flying out between them. He breathes with wonder. "I know, right?" she says, and they stare at themselves in the mirror, the sparks running all along their skin, meeting at everyplace. He runs a hand down her arm: it isn't Jason watching Jason anymore, in the mirror. It's only Jason.

-- Page 24 --

"I can't believe I spent four hundred dollars to watch you drown a damn possum," Tara says, having gotten control of herself enough that she can turn back into a bitch. "You better not have done anything bad to my Momma." Lettie Mae stands there, vacant for a moment, feeling around for it: the pain, the worry, the care. Out of me and into him. What to do with all that recovered space? It's for people who are weak but still have faith: sing the night that made you. "Is my demon gone forever?" Jeanette says it is. "You belong to yourself now." You have been reminded that you always did.

"But we're gonna have to do something about your daughter," Miss Jeanette says, putting those Hermit eyes on her like lanterns. "You ain't gonna do nothing for me," Tara says under the moon. "Your demon isn't the same kind as your mother's, but it's definitely living in you." Tara snorts and flies off the handle, proving her right: "Now you think I got a motherfucking demon? Bitch, you as fucked up as your bus." Jeanette points him out, with her cane: "That's that demon talking right now. And deep down inside, you know it's true..." She is older than Lettie Mae; she is younger than Tara. Tara assures her that she neither wants nor needs the witch-woman's help, and couldn't afford it anyhow. "Do you have many friends? Do you have trouble keeping a job? You have your own place?" She's coming closer, on her crooked legs, leaning on her crooked stick. Tara won't meet her eyes. "You have a boyfriend? How long have you ever been with the same man?" Tara finally looks up; she is stuck in the hedge-witch's eyes. "Mm-hm," the crone says, knowing better: she retreats into the forest, away at last. "Find me when you're ready." Under the silver full moon, the maiden leads her mother by the hand, back home.

Sookie, finally off work, lets herself into his house. The electric lights are on, and dead candles sit with dripped wax on top of books. She calls his name and visits the hidey-hole, clicking the panel open and lifting the trapdoor: it's empty. It is only dust, and books, and the cold ground. She creeps through the house, leaving it open and unsecured, and looks down at the blankets by the fire: the red velvet where she became new. It's too soon for things to change; she sits on a couch, beside the bed they made. Not on it, because she is alone. And she waits.

Morning comes and Royce's goons make napalm, toss bottles through the windows of Malcolm's nest. The screams begin, loud and horrible, as they lie there, pinned to the cold ground, unable to move or lift themselves from danger. And all the worry, and care, and sadness of Bon Temps flows out of them, and into the house that Malcolm bought.

At this very moment, several things are happening: the new vampires of Renard Parish are sacrificed on the altar of anger and hatred. Death by fire, death by hubris: Amy is whisking Jason away from his death, and bringing Pluto home. Sam Merlotte has just woken up, naked, in the forest again. And Andy has taken Terry out fishing, like before. It helps us when we can find ways to connect the ones we love to the lives they used to understand. Andy offers that the problem with Iraq is jealousy: "No wonder they're so pissed off at us. We got channel cats and Shreveport poontang." I can assure you that this is not the case. "I missed this," Andy says, but Terry's spotted Sam Merlotte's amazing ass, running through the forest. He throws up some military moves and shows him to Andy, who is amazed. "Yup," says Terry, sitting down again. "I done that before." Andy wonders where he's going, and Terry says, "Where has he been? Nobody cares." Before Andy can ask him what that even means, his phone rings: *Hawaii Five-0*.

Sookie wakes up on Bill's couch, to the new morning. He's still not home. The old tintype -- *Mr. W.T. Compton and family* -- sits in a frame on a nearby table. This is his history. His son spotted him from the porch, like Pluto coming home. She is sitting in his history, and his humanity. He is a new country too.

Malcolm's nest is just ... gone. It's a pile of burnt up trash. Bud Dearborn, ever classy, points out that at least we know arson will get rid of them. Sookie arrives, all kinds of freaked out, and she pushes toward the next. Past a guy laughing about the Special of the Day (Country Fried Vampire), and a cop pointing out that the Killer's still on the loose and now they're going to be tied up investigating a hate crime they're all secretly relieved happened. You can't say something stopped being what it's always been: that's the ending of the world. Andy crosses his arms at her, and she asks if Bill is there. Bud delights in it: "No way of knowing. They're awful messy..." But Andy tells her the worst bit: there were four of them. The men lay out the coffins: Nietzsche, Dracula, Erzulie, and the fourth man in the fire.

## RESTING PLACES

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 8 | Aired on 10.26.2008

*The Fourth Man In The Fire* - Eric summons Sookie for help with an embezzling vampire, while Tara goes into a total meltdown and Amy reveals the not-so-adorable side of drug addiction.

Sookie, with hope fading that Bill somehow missed getting napalmed by Royce and his gang, returns home to -- of course -- mop the floor. When loved ones die, that's what she does. Of course, it also serves as a rude reminder of her dead Gran, from which the last week has been kind enough to distract her due to the running around having sex with Bill and getting her blood sucked. This turns her into a total bitch.

Which is ironic, because Tara is the more advanced Pokemon level of Raging Bitch on a regular day, but spends the morning regressing to a six-year-old now that her mom is undemoniated, and then turns the bitchery up to 11 through the afternoon for reasons unknown. She wigs out on Sam, Sookie and even kinda Lafayette and eventually notices that she's acting like a total freak, so she heads out into the forest to see old Miss Jeanette.

Sookie goes to the graveyard to put flowers on Bill's original grave, and he randomly crawls up naked out of the ground and bones her in the graveyard, and it's sort of fucked up, but mostly she just doesn't want him to bite her on the neck. Which would be pretty smooth if she'd just manage to avoid overdramatically taking her B-12 in the office of who else but Sam Merlotte, who knows damn well what it means.

Sam behaves horribly in this episode, first playing off Terry Bellefleur's instability and PTSD shame to cover up his secret, then telling Tara she is a sex grunter, and then lying to Andy Bellefleur that his parents were nudists, rather than Border Collies. Oh, and he openly bitches and moans about Bill not dying, and bonds with Bud Dearborn over being total racists. Somebody needs to smack him with a newspaper.

Next day, Sookie's back to Crazy Manicland, recycling her Arlene compliments and offering to babysit and tossing a bunch of stones in the glass house of how pathetic fangbangers are. Sookie, *please*. While Bill (adorable) and Sookie (decompensating quickly into total freakout) babysit Arlene's kids, Rene pops her the question, making her a four-time bride. That's our girl.

Jason and Amy have awesome V experiences and she becomes the new waitress at Merlotte's. Sookie is a complete bitch to her, for no good reason except that she's about to go completely nuts. Then, once the V's left their systems, it turns out Amy is a psycho junkie who makes Jason go with her to brutally kidnap Lafayette's V supplier/john, played by Jimmy James aka Red Swingline Stapler aka [Dwight Dixon](#), Stephen Root. Who is so abjectly abject that he kind of makes you want to hug the nearest vampire just in case they're having a bad day. Like, as the guy is making Lafayette swear that he really does find him attractive and this isn't merely prostitution, he's put on "Eternal Flame" in the background. Doesn't that make you need a hug?

Finally, Bill comes home to find all six feet four inches of Eric Northman taking a relaxing bath in that insane tub of his, and we learn that Eric is the "Sherriff of Area Five," which means he's the boss or something. What he bosses Bill to do, in this case, is bring Sookie to

Fangtasia! so that she can A) marvel at the pink cableknit truth about Pam and B) figure out who's been stealing cash money. But the second she does, the perp -- Long Shadow -- jumps in her face and starts eating her, or choking her, or showing her how to tie a four-in-hand using your teeth. You know how zoomy they are, it was kind of a blur. All I know is, the lead actress of this television show better survive this television cliffhanger, or we are fucked.

Wild cards: Hoyt is starting to be creeped out by Sookie; that dead preacher's son, now making the rounds as the latest hatemongerer is a vampire fetish object (extra points if he'd been wearing a bowtie!); and the titular fourth man in Malcolm's nest was young fangbanger Neil from KY, which causes Coroner Mike to blubber inconsolably; Andy and Bud seem to have forgotten about the Killer entirely. Four episodes left.

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Sookie stares down at the four coffins, crispy, and Bud offers her some water. "Four? You're sure you found four bodies?" Andy nods, but remembers protocol and warns her they shouldn't be talking about an ongoing investigation; she pushes back. "Andy, not now. Not with me." He sighs and nods again. "There's four sets of remains inside four coffins." She shoves past him, toward them, and Andy grabs at her. "Andy, if you don't take your hands off me right now I swear to God I will kill you." She runs up the hill to where Mike the Coroner stands, alone with a cop, staring down. "Jiminy Christmas," says the man who's not Neil from Kentucky. "That's what happens to vampires?" Mike laughs, because this has nothing to do with him. They stare down into a coffin: it's a soup of blood. "Evidently. Plus, we got three more." The cop is totally grossed out, and Mike keeps laughing. "I hope you skipped breakfast!" He spots Sookie and doesn't really care. "Did Bud send you up here to make an ID? Because..." She barks, a rough and terrible sound, and runs away again. Andy calls after her, but nobody cares. Of everybody on this scene, only one of them had a man in the fire. Everyone else is safe.

Brothers and sisters, if you'll turn now to Hymn #203, "[Fuck My Legless Grandmother](#)," we'll see if we can't get to the bottom of all this. Because what appears at first to be a disjointed episode of *Thirtysomething* crossed with scenes from "[Strange Love](#)" is actually a pretty excellent meditation on what happens when you meet the Buddha, if you look at it right. Here's the text from the song:

*You want me to complain?  
All right then: Fuck this  
Fuck you, fuck all of you  
With your sniveling self-pity  
And fuck all your lousy parents  
Fuck my lousy parents while we're at it  
Fuck my selfish bohemian sister  
And her fucking bliss  
Fuck my legless grandmother...  
And fuck you for dragging me to this terrible place  
And not letting me have a Snickers bar:  
I'm going to get something to eat!*

If you're not familiar with the poet, Ruth Fisher, the background to this melody is a pretty simple story: a woman loses her husband, not just once but many times, and tries to fill the

aching hole in herself in lots and lots of ways. She tries, endlessly, to incorporate herself into her childrens' lives, and is rebuffed. She tries, endlessly, to reinvent herself. She dates souls more broken than her own, and even remarries. But the best thing she ever did was join a cult. And this cult, a self-help forum called The Plan, told her there was salvation from her pain. That emotions are rational and can be thought around, that God is a crutch, that exposition and explosion are the keys to repairing the cracks in our foundation. Not untrue, depending on the context and the history, but more importantly: the only person that hates salvation more than I do is Alan Ball, and this episode tells why almost as eloquently as Ruth just did. At some point you have to realize the story doesn't stop until we're dead. Assigning your pain or guilt or fear a number, like a diet plan, doesn't take them off the table. Everything's on the table, all the time. Giving in to the seductive idea that something, or somebody, can save you once and for all is the first step to getting really fucked up.

-- Page 2 --

It could be a man, who shows you that you're not alone, and helps you heal your perfect, holy body, who chases away your fear and doubt until the fever consumes you. It could be the empty ritual of church, in well-worn sayings and crazy-ass hats, letting the devil in the back door while you linger at the front. It could be a hedge-witch, just past the crossroads, taking you apart and putting you back together; or the return of your mother's lap, corncakes and bacon in the kitchen, turning you into a little girl again. It could be the beast inside a beautiful woman, whose rage suddenly expresses your own. It could be the drug that we call God, or V: whenever you arrive at a stopping place, you can stop and rest. But if you plan to stay there you will grow moss, and the cracks will get wider, and your foundation falls apart. The human mind and spirit were not meant to stop. They were meant to go, go, go, forever. When you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him. Because it's not the Buddha, it's another trick: the real one's just a mile on down the road. Forever and ever. And that's what Ruth is telling us: we don't ever bury anything, but we can let those things bury us if we're not careful. Grace is a wave that never breaks, fuck my legless grandmother, amen.

Sookie runs home, in screaming denial about one death, now two, and sits at the table. Lovely pink roses stand on the kitchen table, where she sits and listens to his voicemail message one last time. She doesn't leave a message. On the floor, from the door to the table, are the footprints of a very long journey: the dirt of a murder scene, tracked across the floor. She forgot to take her shoes off, like she normally does; there's mud everywhere on her beautiful kitchen floor. She knows what she has to do. This is her house, now.

Sookie scrubs and scrubs, the mud of a murder screaming across her brain, trying to get it clean, to wipe away the memory. A tiny girl against tall walls, scrubbing the floor clean: what does it remind you of? All that sex and pain and pleasure, that deep knowing, what have they been hiding from you, further down the road? What did the Buddha say to you? It comes in flashes; Sookie reads her own mind. Adele, Adele, Adele. In a pool of blood she cleaned up just like this, because if the scars don't show you were never hurt, wounded, marked. Touched. She hurls the muddy cloth against the wall and starts to sink. He is dead. Gran is dead. Jason's gone. She is becoming an orphan on the cold kitchen floor, just past dawn.

-- Page 3 --

Not even eight yet and Lettie Mae's awake and well, tossing bottle after bottle into the bin. Food for the demon, sacrifices to him, out with the garbage. Tara comes out wondering

what she's up to, the clashing loud sounds, after the night they had; Lettie Mae is beautiful. Like sunshine through the rain; I thought the actress maybe touched the ceiling last week, if not went right over it, but no. Nobody but the most talented could become two such different women. Look at her beautiful face! This is the face that looked down at Tara when she was just little, when the demon was quiet. That's the smile that greets her now. "Good morning, baby! Did I wake you? I'm almost done. Just a couple more loads..." Some of them are half-full; it's the first time Tara's seen anything that way in a while. "Useless to me. Just fuel for demon fire. The bottle kept him alive for forty years. As long as I keep the stuff out of my house, he ain't never coming back."

And if we rule out demons I guess we rule out vampires and werecollies and psychics and then we have no show, so yes, I can believe that the demon was so into gluttony that he would allow bottles half-full to collect in the house. Alcoholics don't, but alcoholics aren't demons, and inside Lettie Mae were both. It's the same reason Eddie's as turned on by the ritual of bloodletting and the angelic beauty of the Reverend Steven Newlin as by the sex itself: no ritual is empty.

"Let's see how long you can keep it up," Tara scoffs. "Forever," Lettie Mae promises, and gives the Buddha a high-five. "Gotta be, I'm down to my last chance." Nothing's forever, but this is the first dawn. "You didn't have a drink today?" She didn't even want one. Tara smells her breath, the kind of shameful thing children and parents don't normally talk about or do so obviously, but it's not liquor. "Is that maple syrup?"

Lettie Mae's so proud, it's heartbreaking. "Check the kitchen, I made hoecakes." She struts behind her daughter, into the house where a beautiful breakfast waits. Breakfast, on this show, is a really powerful symbol: Gran serving her daughters and her son every morning, Sookie singing poetic odes to sausage; there are three breakfasts in this episode alone. And I couldn't figure it, beyond an easy signifier for the support of the family that nobody's getting because everybody is grown or an orphan, and then also because this whole show is consumption, what we eat and how we do it and why (and who!), and then I thought it was a pretty good metaphor for suckling at mama, like they do with V and the vamps do with us, and how orphans are denied that essential right, but no. All of these and more: breakfast marks that meridian that separates light and darkness. The dawn means that last night, however dark, is gone, and we're starting a new story. Together, eating our food together that we cooked together, in the family in the sunlight. Meals together are the oldest ritual we have; this is the one that starts when the night is over.

-- Page 4 --

"Are you serious? I haven't had hoecakes since..." Since Lettie Mae's mother was alive. "I always could make 'em, just never did. The demon never let me." Demonstrate breakfast! Tara sits down like a little girl, kicking those Juilliard legs, six years again or younger, and spears a cake. "Mmm! You made these with bacon grease." She's so young for a moment. She piles them onto her plate. "It's the only way." Tara sucks them down like a vampire, like she's starving: trying to fill up on love, to replace the hole her childhood left with another chance at happiness. "You eat, baby girl. I got me some more devil juice to take out." Tara smiles out the door at her Momma. Strong little Mommy, back from the dead.

Jason and Amy lay on his bed, minds blown. His sheets are, needless to say, black satin, because sex is a show Jason puts on for Jason. Until today. "Goddamn. You... You are not like anybody I ever met." Amy agrees, and they stare up together, and Jason explains what it is,

that thing he's been looking for, the way it finally presented itself: "It felt like the whole world came together. Me, you, the bed, the house. We were all one big giant..." Love, love, love. Amy nods: "...Organism." Jason goes for the rimshot: "Yeah, mine was huge." She laughs and he stretches, thoughtful and spent. "I never knew vamp blood could do something like this to you."

Amy agrees. "I mean... I've had V partners before, but this was... on a totally different planet." They curl up, around each other. "You're an extraordinary being." He jumps, not sure if she's making fun, or trying to offend. "What's that supposed to mean?" She's not wrong. "In some ways, we barely know each other, right? But you felt that. Tell me that that wasn't just me. We ... tapped into each other." He nods, excitedly, and falls all over himself trying to agree.

Amy Burley looks Jason in the eye. "There's something old and good and wise deep down in you." ([Starbuck! He is Starbuck!](#)) "I have to know that person." Jason's put off, troubled by it. Nobody, as they say, wants the embarrassment of absolution. Not when so much of the scaffolding is getting by on blame and lack of expectations. As long as Jason is retarded and amoral, he'll never let anybody down. Tell him how wonderful he really is, and the whole thing falls apart. "Come on, cut it out. Nobody who knows me has ever called me wise." Doesn't make it true. Me and Diogenes had a twenty riding on you since day one. "Then nobody really knows you." It's true. Painful and loving, wonderful and terrible in the same moment. Nobody really knows you, so you don't exist and you don't matter/Nobody knows you but me. He is overcome, and hides his tears from her, burrowing down into the bed.

-- Page 5 --

*Say my name  
Sun shines through the rain*

No matter what happens, it's real and it's true. It's so easy, week to week, to say a character is good, so they are right, and next week say a character is bad, so all the things they've done are invalid. That's not how people work. Amy's not evil any more than Jason is pointless or Arlene's stupid. The difference between a good TV show and a bad TV show, or any other kind of story, is that assigning these arbitrary values either works or it doesn't. When the scary music plays on a character in a bad show, that character is bad, and everything he does or ever did is suspect. That's just another way of letting your brain stop working, and that's not what brains are for, and that's not what this show is like.

It's like blowing off Jason's storyline, or Tara's, because it's not Sookie: they're the same story, played on three different instruments. At this second Amy couldn't be more right, and there's nothing sad or shameful in him hearing it from her first. Most of us never get to hear it at all. "Are you blushing?" Jason is as amazed by himself as he is by her, and by the fact that he's not lying: "I don't want you to go." She admits that she was planning on burning through, but if he's offering a place to crash... "Stay," he says excitedly, kissing her. "Stay with me! I don't wanna ever leave this bed. Let's just screw and do V until we starve!" She laughs.

"Sure, okay, but I mean, let's hold off on the screwing. I'm a respectable girl." Jason's confused and jumps off her immediately, visions of Maudette and Dawn and other girls dancing in his head. "Oh, did I hurt you? I'm sorry if I got carried away, it was just so amazing..." His voice is panicked, and she tries to comfort him before explaining. "Jason,

we didn't have sex." He laughs at her, but she's telling the truth. "We were together on V. Deeper than I've ever felt with anybody ever before. But physically, we barely touched." He's not buying it; she pulls down the sheets: "Panties still on." Jason is totally freaked out, because if you're not your body then what are you? "Whoa! What... The fuck?" She smiles indulgently: "I told you. It's better than sex." He collapses onto her, relieved and full of joy. Me, you, the bed, the house. He laughs like a child. So this is love.

Tara comes running, excitedly, only to find Sookie with her head in the oven. It's a disturbing image. "Jesus Christ, what the hell are you doing?" Sookie pops up, irritated, with a face mask on and a bottle of Easy-Off in hand: "Stop with the JC. I'm cleanin', what does it look like? Watch your feet, I just waxed." Tara, still jumpy from the sight, tosses off a joke -- "I hope you mean the floor..." -- but Sookie's not having it. She charges past Tara across the room, finally turning with an annoyed look on her face. This is the funeral, finally, after a week. You are crashing a funeral. My Gran died this morning, when I remembered it. When I came down off the high and realized Bill was gone too.

-- Page 6 --

"Can I help you? I'm up to my elbows in Easy-Off..." Tara's not catching the 'tude, which is scary, because she's too thrilled to look: "My momma made me hoecakes this morning!" Sookie literally goes, "So?" "She cooked me breakfast! When's the last time you saw my momma lift a finger before noon for anything besides Mad Dog 20/20?" The more she talks, the more pissed off Sookie gets. Lower your voice. Leave the premises. This is not an appropriate event: *Look, I get it. But right now she needs to be alone. You're a good friend. Now get the fuck out of here. Please.*

"We went into the woods to get a \$445 hoodoo exorcism last night, you do not wanna get me started on that..." Like today's just a normal day, a normal morning, breakfast for everybody. "My grandmother's dead. At least you got someone to make breakfast for you. You ever stop and think about what's happening with others before you barge in on them?" Tara gets it, but before she can apologize she spots the marks on Sookie's neck. "Oh my God, are those fang marks?" Sookie shrugs, with a nasty look. "So what? It means someone cared for me, when everyone else left me high and dry." Jason hit her and ran off into a hell of his own creation; even Sam went off somewhere (to bang Tara); that house swallowed her up in memory and pain and she ran across the graveyard to the one man who could understand; who wanted her as much as she wanted him. And that's just the first death: she's still on her knees before this newer one, can't even think it much less talk about it. She carries it all on her back.

"No wonder you're all crazy! Let a vampire make a meal of you..." Speaking ill of the dead, the truly dead. "Why am I the only person that doesn't think vampires are monsters?" Tara gets in her face: "They *drink our blood.*" And to change the subject, to Sam Merlotte: "What's to say Bill won't leave you once he's had his fill?" Why should your answer work out when mine is damned to fall apart? "Do you have any idea what I've been through today? A friend would ask," Sookie tells her, opening the door, and Tara tells her to fuck off. "Don't tell me how to be your friend, I'm the only one you got, goddamn it." Sookie whispers, hatefully, "Lord's name in vain..." and Tara tells her, rightfully, to fuck off.

We don't retreat to the old dead corners and unthinking rules when the world's falling apart. What you're saying when you spout the old reliables like that is that you're can't be bothered -- or you're too busy with something else -- to actually be present. You've

allowed your brain to stop. Sadly, though, in this case it's the latter: she's on autopilot because she has to be. "Get out of my house! I've gotten very good at losing people like you. You are only making it easier for me." She shakes, terrified by herself and the enormity of it. Gran, Jason, Tara; she can feel Sam slipping away too. "Bitch, I don't even wanna be here. If you are hell-bent on being alone in this world, I ain't gonna stop you." Tara takes off and Sookie slams the oven door, once and then again. Maybe, just maybe, she is losing it a little bit.

-- Page 7 --

Jason brings pizza into the living room from the kitchen, all, "Oh, man. I wanna not have sex with you again so bad, you don't even know!" He looks her in the eye and she smiles and walks away, leaving him hanging: "But that V that we did was the last I had." He gets a whiny look -- not panicked, yet, not like before -- and she tells him to chill. "When we need more, we'll go out and get it. Don't be greedy. We'll be okay for a while." She makes so much sense right now, but it's just The Plan. Of course everything's fine right now; the mistake is in thinking things will be this easy forever. "You sure you don't want some? Pepperoni and sausage!" He offers her the breakfast he made: cold pizza from the fridge. "No, thank you. I only eat organic. The cleaner my body is, the more intensely I feel the V."

It all makes sense from this angle, doesn't it? The V wants to be in us, just like orange juice and LSD. These fragments we shore up against our ruins; the whispered legends of childhood and drug addicts, the secret messages on cigarette packs and bottles of beer, the marijuana myths. Eat organic and do some V: you'll see God in another person, you'll be less alone. "Wait, why do you have two televisions in the same room?" He admits the gigantic console below the newer model is busted: "I just keep it 'cause it was my parents'." She wonders if she can ask, then asks how they died. He looks away and says he doesn't talk about it, and her immediate "okay" is so understanding and gentle that it opens the door in him.

It's a dare. He doesn't drop her gaze until he starts talking. "It was a flash flood. They were caught on the bridge down by the Parish Road, and got swept out in the river. My little sister and I were staying at our Gran's while they went out. They didn't think I could look after Sookie by myself, even though I was almost eleven... Sometimes I think ... If I was a better kid, they wouldn't have had to drop us off at Gran's. Then they wouldn't have been on the bridge at the exact point when..." He sighs and drops his pizza, looking at it with disinterest. No more breakfast. Ever again.

"So your grandma raised you after that?" He grins, thinking of her. This is a funeral too. "I moved back here when I was eighteen, even though Gran would have rather kept an eye on me." He admits she died too, a week ago, and Amy is moved. She looks at him with too much understanding, too much gentleness and love, and he closes up tight. Or tries to. "Goddamn. I don't mean to be spillin'. I never do this." Not with anybody? Not even with Sookie? "Least of all her. She brings out the worst in me." She points back my own ugliness. Everyone who visits Fangtasia! is looking for death. He dreamed of fucking Liam when he was wide awake. She brings out the worst in me. "We had this big fight after Gran died, and ... I hit her." He swallows it. "I am the worst brother in the world," he says, horrified and sad. Surprised to hear the words taking form in his mouth and sound so true.

-- Page 8 --

Amy sits and touches his shoulder gently, trying to catch his eyes and bring them back. Here, now. Be with me: "That's ridiculous. I've seen who you are inside. I've *been* there. And you're good." Oh the way the V lets her walk about inside him and tell him things he never knew. He jerks away; it's too much. Boys don't. She turns his face to hers, daring him to hear her. Daring him to see her, seeing him. Seeing himself matter. She wipes away his tears, and sees it in his eyes: he does. As long as nobody moves and nothing changes and nobody reminds him what he's lost, yes: he can admit he's worthwhile. But you must keep it, like a secret, quiet and hidden, because if anyone finds out, he will die. She kisses him soft, and slow. He sighs in relief. They aren't tears of grief, that's too small: they're from the ocean sadness only swims in.

Terry Bellefleur unloads a gator head from Sam's truckbed, remarking that she's a beauty; Sam says they'll put it over the bar: "Drunks like talking to the animals." Woof! Speaking of animals, Terry pulls something horrible on a string around his neck out of his shirt: "Check it out. Possum prick!" Sam's like whoa. "Shot one last week. I was gonna stuff it, but I left it out back and it got to raining, then three days later, ain't nothing left but possum sludge and bones. I saved this, though. Possums have a two-pronged penis!" Sam's like, *Oh uh-huh?* "It's supposed to bring good luck." Sam claps him on the shoulder and tells him they should keep the two-pronged prick between them -- "The girls might get the wrong idea" -- and Terry puts it away. He needs all the luck he can get.

Terry remembers the other thing, and asks Sam why he was running through the woods naked this morning. "It looked an awful lot like you. Except you wear clothes..." He has these little sparkling gaps in him, where he's having a conversation and then it goes somewhere else, like there's a connection between the sparkling gap and his open mouth. It's disconcerting and sad. Terry squeezes his eyes shut and looks down. "Maybe I'm seein' things again. Except usually when I see people who ain't there, it's..." Sam knows: "It's the insurgents." Terry says, though, that this one didn't look that way, and Sam makes a choice. "But you said he was running, though, huh? Plenty of cover in the trees. How could you tell for sure? ...I believe you saw what you saw, I just don't know why anyone would run naked through the woods in broad daylight..." Terry laughs and says he's probably right, and then his face changes again. "Shit I hate being this way, Sam." And Sam is guilty then, but just slightly less than he is afraid, so he claps Terry on the shoulder and takes him inside: "We're a long way from Fallujah."

-- Page 9 --

Sookie sits on Gran's porch in Gran's blanket -- her porch now, her blanket -- and watches the rain come down. Any other night he'd be coming here, she'd be going there. A week ago she didn't even know what it felt like. Now the night smells like him. She lights a candle in the kitchen, and makes a bouquet. This is a funeral. Roses, is that foxglove? I'm sure it means something but I don't know flowers on sight. She puts the candle in the window, to call him home. She heads out.

In the graveyard it's not raining anymore. She's wearing a yellow dress and no shoes; the bouquet for him is a riot of color. She kneels and clears away the rest of the leaves of ivy from his tombstone. "BELOVED HUSBAND - BRAVE SOLDIER." He died for neither, this time. She weeps and says goodbye: Another one gone. She takes it in, all alone. Again. No brother, no sister. No Bill. Just the rest of a life, back to being a monster, crazy Sookie, touched by grave dirt. She could be a fangbanger as long as he was there, making it worthwhile. Now she has nothing, even less than she had before he came. She'll go home to

an empty house, and live there all her life, and no man will ever quiet the voices again. It was better before she met him, before she knew what it could be like, what it felt like to be free. It was better to live only part of a life, if the alternative is having parts of it ripped away. Without him, none of it was worth it. She's dirty after all.

She walks away slowly, at home in the night, looking around at the dark, and a hand reaches up from the cold ground, strong around her ankle, pulling her down. Down, where she belongs. Down into the dirt. She struggles, finally fighting, away from the mud and the filth and all the death, back into life, fighting for it... And he calls her name. He wasn't pulling her down at all. He was pulling himself up.

*Do you feel my heart beating?*

He's covered in dirt, naked as a dead thing. She stops struggling and looks at his face, covered in the cold, wet earth, and grabs him, pulling him toward her. He pulls her dress off as they kiss, wildly, and their hunger is a song to life and a brutal one. It's too passionate to watch, in the grave dirt, saying no to all that and yes to everything else. They're not pulling each other down; they're pulling each other up. And all the questions she was asking melt away in the air. The fangs come out and he darts at her neck, eyes on fire, hungry and nearly mindless, but she resists. "No, not the neck..." He looks around, panicking, hungry for release, and plunges his fangs into her shoulder, or her breast. It's a different kind of love this time, that they're making. He screams into the night.

-- Page 10 --

Arlene runs to a table and apologizes to them, wondering where the hell Sookie is. Jason and Amy enter; she looks more normal than she has so far and he's wearing a very excellent, very tight blue t-shirt. "Intense. All these animals on the wall, it's like a natural history museum." Jason's never noticed them, much less given an unending undergrad disquisition on their semiotics: "How could you not? Every one of these animals lived a life full of experiences that we can't even imagine..." So is that bad? If she's weirded out by Merlotte's, they can go somewhere else, but that's not it. "Everyone has to eat, right? We're all links on the universal food chain." She points at the animals over the bar, including the brand-new gator head. "See? Squirrel eats nuts, snake eats the squirrel, gator eats the snake. And we can eat pretty much eat anything we want. It's the circle of life!" Instead of dumping her faster than you can blink, he's totally amazed and says he wants to "lick her mind." Give him time. He just found out about thinking like an hour ago.

The shot tracks to the counter, where Terry's got an order up, and then around to the back, where Sookie's running in. You can see the sparks along her skin: the easy answers swirling in her head. It all makes sense now; needs met, never alone again, born out of grave dirt. Sam expresses his deepest sympathies for the horrible sad tragedy of Bill's total death, and she's like, "OH, THINGS ARE AWESOME! BILL'S ALIVE! THEY SAID FOUR BODIES! AND I THOUGHT BILL WAS ONE OF THEM! BUT HE WASN'T! NOT AT ALL! IN FACT HE'S COMPLETELY AWESOME!" Sam is crestfallen, to say the least. My patience with Sam Merlotte is waning. "That must be quite a relief for you," he responds lamely, and she's like "YOU HAVE NO IDEA! ANYWAYS NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT ME! BECAUSE I AM GREAT! GREATGREATGREATGREAT!" She bounces between the ceiling and the floor about sixty billion times and then goes zooming off in another direction; he is bewildered and more than a little sad.

Arlene bugs her about her tardiness, but Sookie just gives her another one of those spooky-eyed lovefest caresses and screams, "YOU LOOK SO BEAUTIFUL TODAY! I LOVE YOU! EVEN IF YOU ARE A BIGOT! SOMETIMES!" Arlene asks Sam WTF and he's like, "Oh, Bill unfortunately didn't *die-die* like we thought." Terry, frustrated and edgy, calls the order up for the third time, but Sookie is too busy *completely freaking out* Hoyt and Rene. "HE GOT MY MESSAGE THAT SOMETHING BAD MIGHT BE BREWING! SO HE FIGURED HE'D SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE GRAVEYARD!" Hoyt, sweetly, asks if he didn't get cold, and Sookie gets twice as fucking weird. "NO! HE WAS IN THE GROUND!" Also, nobody asked for this charming story, Sookie. This shit is why people think you are *retarded*.

-- Page 11 --

"SO AFTER I COULDN'T FIND HIM THEN I HEARD ABOUT THE FOUR BODIES AT THE BURNT-UP HOUSE! YOU CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT I WAS GOING THROUGH! IMAGINE IT! YOU CANNOT! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE! I AM SO HIGH RIGHT NOW THAT I THINK I AM HOLDING YOUR INTEREST! INSTEAD OF FREAKING YOU THE FUCK OUT!"

Rene asks if there were, as reported, three of the troublemaker vamps, who was the fourth body? "TO BE HONEST I DO NOT GIVE A FUCK! BECAUSE IT WAS NOT BILL! BUT I HEARD IT WAS A FANGBANGER! HAVE YOU HEARD OF THOSE BECAUSE BLESS THEIR HEARTS! IT IS SO SAD! IT IS THESE GIRLS WHO HAVE SEX WITH VAMPIRES! SOMETIMES RIGHT THERE IN A GRAVEYARD! THEY ARE DISGUSTING AND PATHETIC! I AM DIFFERENT BECAUSE I AM IN TRUE LOVE! BUT THEY ARE JUST BEING USED! FOR SEX! ALSO BLOOD! ANYWAY I HAVE TO GO TAKE VITAMIN B-12 FOR ALL THE BLOOD I GOT SUCKED OUT OF ME BY A VAMPIRE WHO WAS FUCKING ME REALLY HARD IN A GRAVEYARD, LOL! BYE BYE NOW!"

Rene and Hoyt are like, "Soooo... There's a downside, I see." But they don't exist anymore. Sookie goes to get the order that nearly fried Terry's brain this time, but somebody's already got it. The "new girl," Terry says, and yeah. It's Amy Burley. She's sort of turning into the [Vanessa Abrams](#) on us, isn't she? She drops off like fifteen plates at a billion tables, and lays down some annoying "we got a four-top open" lingo that would be completely different if Arlene or Sookie said it, but I mean, is Texas the South? Because that shit would not fly if Merlotte's were in Texas. "We do not have shit. Stop touching people's food and fooling the PTSD vet that you work here, drop the Obama Hope Police act and sit your organic ass down. You need a beer is what you fucking need." Jason slides up to Sookie all, "You are allowed to still hate me, but I really need you to like this girl, because she's how I get fixed. She told me I was good. I need this to live."

Sookie stares at Amy, relentlessly unfriendly, but one of the very good things about Amy, which this episode kind of demands that I point out as we go, is that she's not pushing through. She knows what she's up against. Arlene just kind of shoves past whatever it is without even seeing it, and Sookie stands up to the tippy-top of her four feet three inches and *dares* it to fuck with her, but Amy's like, "Yes. I am sort of an asshole. However." Which is actually more nuanced than either of the other two, and is a thing I love about her. Like, she's not confused about how she just way overstepped and made an ass of herself: "Sorry about that. You looked really swamped and the natives were gettin' restless, so...You're Jason's sister, right? It's... I've heard so much about you." She shakes Sookie's hand, but girl's not budging an inch. Arlene, responding to the set of Sookie's back and the outside, scoots in from the side like a skidding cartoon character entering a scene: "Who [*the fuck*] are you?"

"My name's Amy, Amy Burley. I'm with Jason... And you must be Arlene, with the beautiful red hair! It's so nice to meet you." Arlene's thrown and all she can throw up is like, "How did you crack our secret table-numbering code, Outlander?!" Amy explains that clockwise as a direction has been discovered wherever she's from, just like Bon Temps, in fact, and that puts Arlene at ease somewhat, but like nothing compared to what she does next, which is produce a bunch of cash from her pocket and hand it over, *plus* a sideways compliment: "I think the guys at table 5 like you, 'cause they left you a really nice tip." (Because, of course, you are irresistible to men!) Arlene is bought and paid for: "Sam, I think we might have found a replacement for Dawn!" Sookie, betrayed now twice, grins nastily at Jason and leaves: "Looks like you did too." Jason, of course, grins like he hadn't even thought of that and ought to put it in the column with all the other things, and kisses Amy's forehead. Is it bad that I am loving Mean Girl Sookie this much? I mean, my favorite characters are obviously Jason and Tara, I haven't been secretive about that, and this episode is about how horribly she can treat them, but it's still so, so fun.

Tara sees the laundry drying in the yard and goes to take it down, amazed at her mother's demon-free energetic nature, and Lettie Mae comes running up with a church lady; they are both wearing those amazing crazy dresses you see in my neighborhood on Sunday, and quite elaborate hats. They are like a couple of pastel Sputniks, orbiting closer and closer to Tara's soul. They nitter and twitter and blah blah at her about how she should go to church. And why? Because it has helped Lettie Mae *so much*.

Lettie Mae spins out a bullshit story about how after two years she "heard the call: the good Lord said Lettie Mae, you been away too long. Your church needs you!" She's begging, openly, for Mabel's approval; she needs it. Mabel means church and church means her day starts today, no witches and no deals and no demons -- just a calling from the Lord, and then a beautiful dress, lofted toward the church on angel wings, just like everybody says it happens. Just like every bitch in that building told her it needed to be. And Mabel nods her approval. "You should have heard her testify. The entire congregation was filled with the spirit!"

Tara has no doubt Lettie Mae was "full of it," and watches this display in total disgust. Because if we're clearing the decks, then breakfast wasn't an apology, it was amnesia. And all that pain, the crossroads and what's beyond them, are being pissed on. It's not the most mature response, to want our parents to bleed for their sins, but it's also not the most atypical. And in the grand scheme you should be strong enough to let it go, and let them join whatever church they want, sure. If you're positive it's real, you have no claim on their happiness... But it's not real. They were witches by midnight, sacrificing blood to their own demons. You don't forget that, you incorporate it. *Incorporate*, take it into your body, open up that room and air it out, and learn to live there, in the bigger house. And what Lettie Mae is doing is taking all those years and putting them somewhere we can't get to them anymore, like Sookie constantly washing the kitchen floor.

Tara laughs at them again and again but they keep pushing, like the woman at the store when we first met her, and finally she gives in. "Shit. Are you even listening to what you're saying? You can lie to yourself and everyone else but when you go to bed, you are just as fucked up and miserable as I am. And going to church, and wearing a crazy-ass hat, ain't

gonna make you a better person." She stomps off, and Lettie Mae confides that her daughter has a demon in her. Mabel nods sagely: "My granddaughter had a demon in her. They everywhere!" It's not that religious people are stupid, it's that stupid people are religious, because it's easier, which is a very different -- an opposite, in fact -- proposition. Real religion, like anything else, means your brain doesn't stop. Engaging with anything, from a TV show to another person to God, isn't a one-time effort. Fuck my legless grandmother or not, there's another Buddha at the next intersection, pulling you along.

Arlene's sad on the phone, calling her disappointing babysitter "sugar" and "baby," and when she hangs up she's clearly exhausted on multiple levels. "You know," Terry says nervously, sweetly, "I like kids..." He nods, and turns a conversational corner: "Donuts, too." Arlene actually accepts with a maybe, but only if he brings a lady friend along: "Lisa likes a female in the house." Terry comes closer, drinking her in: "I ain't had a lady friend since I come home." She watches him staring at her and, because he's so damned quirky and weird, has no idea where it's going; the next corner he'll turn. "That's some bad luck for you, I guess?" True indeed. He keeps staring. "Did something ... happen, there ... that you been keeping to yourself? 'Cause you could talk to me, you know, if you're wantin' to..." It's too much. He shivers and turns it again: "No, I'd... I'd just as soon sit here and listen at you. I like your voice." If Dawn was parakeets and angels, Arlene is late '70s sitcoms and violins tuning up. "...And your clavicles." She's touched, and weirded out, and takes that as her cue to leave.

Bussing tables, Sookie tries for like an entire second. "I've been admiring your necklace all day." Amy nods, pleased. "Oh thanks, it's a lariat. I made it." Sookie's grudgingly impressed, and Amy offers to make her something, but Sookie's still in her interracial dating phase -- something Amy surely recognizes -- so she takes it on the offensive: "Thanks, but I don't think my boyfriend much likes silver." Amy wearing a silver lariat: noted. They move to the next tables, and Sookie turns hooded eyes on her. "You know my brother's a dog, don't you?" Amy's surprised. She brings out the worst in him. And vice versa. Sookie gets closer and closer, won't blink or drop her gaze: "He's all charm and smiles in the beginning, but the second he gets tired of you, he's gonna stop callin'. Before you know it, he's off with some other floozy." Amy smiles, she knows this part. She knows how angry Sookie is, he told her. And she knows this is not exactly charitable either. Sookie realizes what she just said: "Not... not that you are one! But trust me, it's as regular as the seasons." She shrugs: hate him as much as I do, please. We can both get out of this alive. Otherwise, you're the pretty girl in his life, and I am an orphan, and you're taking him away. What interests me is how, this time of all times, we don't hear Amy thinking, responding to this. "You seem like a sweet girl. I don't want you to get hurt."

-- Page 14 --

Amy nods, wise and secure in her wisdom. She's not wrong, but it's only true from her specific angle, and that's something not even she's going to be able to hold onto for long. Still, it bears saying. It bears repeating, whether or not he can hear it, until everybody agrees that it's true. Because it's true: "You know, I don't think Jason's realized even half of what he's going to be. I wouldn't be so quick to judge. I think you might be surprised at what he's capable of." That is some oracular shit right there. Almost scary, how divergent the meanings of that could be.

Sookie considers her as she's leaving, and Arlene approaches. "Hey, Sookie. I've been meaning to talk to you... I've just been a mess lately. You know, with the kids and the double

shifts and Rene and everything, it's been awful hard. And I've probably said some things that I don't mean, but ... That's the pressure talking. I love you like my own sister. I mean you know that, right?" Sookie's cautious, and I mean: this is weird, right? Except that we have to retroactively believe this relationship now, because Arlene's been sending out such negative vibes regarding Bill that she has been coming off as a total bitch. Paquin sells it, and thanks her, and offers to babysit. "I... I didn't... I mean..." Sookie laughs: "I heard you talkin' to Terry. I'm a better choice." Word. Arlene, grateful, agrees. "Rene's taking me to Ruston to see that Oak Ridge Boys tribute band!" Second only to Burning Man in the lexicon of personal hells for yours truly. Can you imagine? Sookie's like, "AWESOME!" and they giggle awhile.

Sam, thundercloud clearly visible over his head, pours his stock of TruBlood deliberately into the sink, a bottle at a time. Tara serves Hoyt his beer, and when he tells her how pretty she looks tonight, he earns a vicious "Fuck you" from our girl. Confused, he pouts: "I'm sorry, w...was that sexist?" Sam asks for a word with her in his office, and she goes without complaint; Hoyt's alone and sad again. "Hey, I get it. You said yourself hiring me might not work out. I piss people off." Her voice gets shaky: "If you wanna fire me, fire me. I totally understand." One more goodbye. Sam almost laughs. "No! You and I are the only ones who get it! It's everybody else who's fuckin' themselves up." He kisses her against the door, and she laughs, wrapped in his arms.

Sookie and Bill lie in a crisp white bed, later. "Doesn't it get old? I mean, you've been doin' it for over a hundred years. Doesn't it get predictable?" Not with you, he says obligatorily: "You're entirely different. And the beauty and the tragedy of it is... you don't know just how different you are." She gets brave enough to ask for pointers, and he scoffs. "There's nothing more natural than the act of makin' love." She smiles in thanks, and he's bewildered. "Who am I to try to change what comes naturally to you?" She looks at him, asking if there's one thing he would change. (PS: Do not do this unless you are dating a vampire from the Civil War, because it's totally stupid and if there were something to change, there are way easier ways to get that accomplished than talking about it that have the additional benefit of not getting your ass murdered.)

-- Page 15 --

"I wouldn't change a thing," he says, stroking her hair and gazing kindly at her until she lies back down. He kisses her forehead and they doze. "What's it like to sleep in the ground?" Bill admits it's not that comfortable, with a hundred-yard stare, but it's safe. "Which, if I recall, is what the three voicemails required of me that night..." She laughs; they are sweet. The doorbell rings and they sit up, startled; she remembers Arlene's date. "Shall I go?" She tells him to stay, because it'll be good for Arlene, but probably pants would be a good idea. She kisses him and runs downstairs; he doesn't take his eyes off her.

The kids at the front door wonder what took so long, and she says she was in the backyard. Lisa stares up at her. "In your nightie?" asks Coby, as Bill appears. "The cat got out," Bill says with that crooked, creepy smile he gets. "Made friends with a squirrel." Lisa points at him, and Arlene gets scared. "Uh, Sookie? You didn't mention that you had company..." Sookie points out that she had no reason to broadcast that, and Arlene's like, "Valid, but I should know who's looking after my kids," and Sookie points to herself and Bill: "Well? Here we are. Is there a problem?" Rene tells Arlene to take it easy, reminding her that Bill had a couple of children once too. Arlene chills a little, but takes off a couple of her silver bangles and puts them on her kids, right in front of him. Sookie is appalled, but Bill's just

like *Oh boy*. Sookie offers pizza and the kids scream and shout; Rene asks if Bill can eat pizza and he says he's heard it's quite delicious, again with that fucked-up smile he gets when he's trying way too hard. Give me chills.

"You know what's good about sex that people never mention? For anywhere between five minutes to an hour, you forget your own fucked-up life." Sam considers that. "Only if it's good. If it's not, it reminds you just how bad your life really is." Tara tells him, then, that he must be pretty good, and they luxuriate in their forgetfulness, laughing. "Thanks, you're not bad yourself," Sam says, in his usual awkward way, and Tara, looking for a fight, immediately rolls away from him in the white sheets. "Easy on the praise, honey." Sam wonders WTF it was this time, and assures her she is *good*, but she keeps pushing. He begs her not to grill him about that stuff, but she finally pushes hard enough that he's like, "Sometimes you grunt." Um, Barkley Barksdale IV is calling you a grunter? Tara goes nuts. "It's just a sound!" he protests, and she's off.

-- Page 16 --

"A gruntin' sound? Like a farm animal?" He says it's more like athletic, like a tennis player. "You mean like Serena?" Sam's mouth opens and then closes again, because *what*? "Because I'm black I sound like Serena Williams?" He still doesn't know how far this fight goes, so he's sort of indulgent at this point, but she's not having any kind of calm-downery. "You racist son of a bitch." She starts getting dressed and, as an impressively stupid followup to the foregoing, literally goes, "How can I be racist? I just had sex with you." Dumb. "You asshole! Why'd you have to go and take the only good ten minutes of my entire day and ruin it like that?" Sam weakly protests that it was more than ten minutes, but Tara is *done*. "Oh, fuck you. Fuck you all." Fuck who, he pleads, as she is bouncing, and staring bewildered long after she's gone: "Everybody. Fuck everybody!"

Fuck you and a bunch of grunting bullshit, fuck my demon-possessed mother, fuck my prostitute drug-dealing gay cousin, fuck my forest witchcraft, fuck my crazy sister's nasty little secrets, fuck Jason for breaking my heart and hitting Sookie. Fuck the entire universe for thinking one little possum could contain thirty years of misery, and pretending any of us deserved breakfast this morning. Fuck you all, for pretending to be my family. If I had a fucking family I wouldn't feel like an orphan. Fuck Adele for dying, fuck Bill for taking Sookie away, fuck you because I know we're both thinking it would be soft little sighs and breath caught in the back of the throat and innocent fucking creamy white skin, none of this athletic grunting with Sookie, oh no, Sookie who's a virgin every time, whimpering and moaning and that soft sound of shock when you touch her, and fuck you for taking away the obvious reason for my rage, because I still feel like a possum in a cage and now there's no way away from it. Fuck you for telling me I know what's going on, and everybody else is fucked up, when I clearly don't and neither do you. So much of the scaffolding that keeps me standing is getting by on blame and lack of expectations: as long as I'm out of control and full of hate, I'll never let anybody down. Act like I'm wonderful and the whole thing falls apart. If I was worth loving I would hate myself a little less, but as it is you're just dicking me around. You'll get your fill, and then you'll leave. She always had more of you.

Bill gives the kids whipped cream and Coby says he'll finish it before Arlene ever finds out: "I ate a whole jar of mayonnaise once." Lisa shivers. "I had to watch." Coby asks Bill why he can't have ice cream, and Bill delicately compares his state to lactose intolerance. "Just like my Aunt Fern. Except she don't tolerate Mexicans." Bill and Sookie make little *yee* faces at each other, and Lisa pipes up. "Aunt Sookie, is Bill your boyfriend?" Sookie asks Bill, in a

deadpan teasing voice, "Bill, would you say that you're my boyfriend?" Bill asks the kids' permission, and Lisa asks if he brings her flowers. "Why no, I haven't yet." Lisa advises him to immediately. "Rene buys flowers for Momma all the time." Bill admits he should mend his ways, and Lisa gives him the hard eye: "You do that. Then we'll talk." Sookie watches him geeking out happily. Coby asks to see the fangs, and while Sookie nervously tries to interrupt that line of questioning, Bill reveals two gigantic fangs made of corn chips or something, and growls at them as they scream and giggle. He's deliriously happy; his smile is totally new and different. He needs more kids around, stat; he's a whole new boy.

-- Page 17 --

On the way home from Ruston, Rene pulls over to a clearing on the road, and checks it out; Arlene's nervous and jumpy about leaving the kids with Bill. He stands nervous behind the truck awhile, hands shaking. The music gets ominous. "*Bébé!* Pass me that Maglite, will you?" She rolls her eyes and gets out, following him into the night. She tries to turn it on, but it won't light. "Are you sure? You better check it. I just put some fresh batteries in there..." She unscrews it, and something falls out. She looks around on the ground, but he's found it. He holds it up in the light, and it sparkles; he is on one knee. "Arlene Fowler..." She gasps, staring at the ring. "Would you do me the honor of being my wife?" She starts to cry, and he puts it on her finger, kissing her sweetly. Laughing and crying with her arms around him, she looks into his eyes: "Why didn't you say anything at the Red Lobster?"

They laugh and hug, and I realize trashy poor people and the trashy poor things they do must be funny to some huge portion of the population, or else the Coen Brothers wouldn't have careers, but I don't really get it. Like proposing at Red Lobster is all that much more abject than hiding an engagement ring in a flashlight? Diamonds are at least as distasteful as cocaine, and for the exact same reason, which is the blood of innocents all over both, and I know I always rant about this but my God. Meth, coke, diamonds, limousines, the institution of marriage: just cut it out, already, because much like heterosexuality, they are *fundamentally tacky*, and I can't pull it together to point and laugh at that, because even racist Americans like Arlene are my people. I don't know. I'm not saying it's evil or wrong, I'm just saying I have never gotten the attraction or the humor. It's like *Monty Python*: I get that it's funny, I just lack that gene.

"I know I've done it four other times, but it never gets old!" My brain stopped! Sookie squeals at the kitchen table and takes Arlene's hand; she barely has to ask Sookie to be her bridesmaid, *again*, and Bill and Rene smile at each other as Sookie and Arlene crawl all over each other, possessed by wedding demons. "Maybe you two are next, huh?" asks Rene, and the whole room goes quiet; Sookie looks down, because that's one of the cracks, isn't it. "...Well, I mean, when it becomes legal..." Everybody smiles guiltily, but it's still weird. Thank God for Lisa, who comes in rubbing her eyes and asking what the fuss is about. "Sweetie, you're gonna be my flower girl!" Arlene screams, and they hug. Saved again, by a man with a diamond. Sookie's loving it, and Bill once again flashes an honest smile: a family, taking shape before your eyes. All those breakfasts still to come:

-- Page 18 --

Bill sits at the table reading the paper, still wearing his band collar, when Sookie comes downstairs. "Morning, dear," he says easily; the table is full of Adele's food, on Adele's plates. From Adele's kitchen. "Bill! Did you make all this?" Am I home again? "I borrowed some of your grandmother's old recipes. But the handiwork is all mine." She smiles

greedily, staring down; he tells her to start with the biscuits. And as she reaches for them, he remarks: "Gonna be clear skies all day." Clear skies, forever. The Buddha. She feels the crack before she sees it, and stares at the window: "Wait, Bill, it's light out." He looks at the window and remarks that she's right; his face begins to burn, and as he turns back to his newspaper he bursts into flame. Gone in a moment. Sookie wakes up gasping, with Tina meowing at her side.

Mike the Coroner sits at his desk, touched by death. Nodding. "Yeah. Yeah okay. No. No, I'll make the call. His mama passed a couple years back, but he had some family in Kentucky..." Bud says the dentist just confirmed Neil's dental records, and he wanted Mike to know right away. Mike's not listening. "Goddangit! Why Neil? He was such a quiet kid. I'd have never thought he'd get mixed up with fangers... Damn. To have nothing left of you to ID but teeth." Bud offers to let a home in Monroe handle Neil, not that there's much left to handle, but Mike squeezes back his tears and shakes his head. "He worked for me. I owe it to him. Give me a couple hours, I'll come over and claim him, okay?" They say goodbye, and Mike weeps.

"Pretty tore up?" Andy asks, sitting in their car outside Merlotte's. "Blindsided him. Had no idea Neil was a fangbanger." Andy points out that Neil was inordinately creepy, which he was. "What nineteen-year-old goes to work for a funeral home?" A fangbanger sort; the kind that needs to look death in the face, that goes looking for it. "I worked in a slaughterhouse when I was fifteen," Bud protests. "They made me clean chitlins." I'm not entirely sure what those are, but I'm pretty sure I won't be cleaning any, ever. Andy spots Sam: "Speaking of freaks..."

Later, in the trailer, Sam's wrapping up the story of Malcolm's visit. "...And that's it. I got no control over what people do after they leave the bar." Was anyone "unusually angry" about the fight? Mainstreaming is for pussies. Everybody was. "Heck, you might as well interrogate the whole town. Between you and me? I wouldn't be heartbroken if you didn't find who did it." Bud smiles warmly, but Andy's not feeling him. I think Andy's so willing to take any human suspect over any other suspect as another way of not dealing with weirdness. Either because he's more comfortable with it than he realizes, or because he's so very uncomfortable with it that he'd prefer not to acknowledge it, even as an active agent in murder and crime. The freakiness of humans preoccupies him: Sam, poor Jason, even Sookie. "Old Mrs. Stackhouse, on the other hand, now that's a real tragedy. Her and Dawn and Maudette Pickens, one right after the other... You fellas got any leads on that?" Don't look at me, look at the vampires and the things on whom they feed. Andy nods, lies that they've got leads, and Sam offers them encouragement. Bud drags Andy away to have lunch, and Sam breathes in their absence until Andy reappears.

-- Page 19 --

"Hey, Sam?" he says, smooth as silk in his own mind, "One other thing. You recall spendin' any time out in the woods lately?" Sam nods, makes a production of it, admitting it: you got me. Your investigative tricks are too much for my simple mind. Andy crosses his arms, self-satisfied. Sam goes in for the kill. "Andy... If... If I tell you, you have to keep this a secret, all right? Nobody in town knows, but..." Andy's loving it; he leans closer. "I come from a family of naturists." Like birdwatchers? "No. No, not naturalists. Naturists. Naturists believe in a freer, clothing-optional kind of lifestyle." Andy looks at him almost cross-eyed, but it's honestly the only explanation you could give: "You're a nudist?" Oh, good Lord no. "But my folks were, I'm embarrassed to say. They spent most of their lives at a nudist colony... in

Texas, just outside Beaumont. But uh... ever since they passed, I honor their memory once a year by... taking a run through the woods the way they used to. It's... It's my private way of mourning. I'm sorry if anybody had to see it." Andy grunts athletically, and smiles, and it's done.

Lafayette laughs at Tara while he's cooking at the grill: "Hooker, you done got took. That was no damn exorcism, that was a straight-up con job." Except, Tara points out, it worked: "It was like aliens beamed down and switched out her brain or something." Which changes everything: if it works, work it. Who cares where the magic comes from, what faith it demands from you, when it comes down to the same thing? To date I have not made out with Anderson Cooper but it doesn't mean I couldn't, one day; it doesn't mean he doesn't exist. She saw it with her own eyes. "That was 445 well-spent. Shit. Happy dance. You should be glad to be rid of that... That's your Mom. I ain't gonna say it." Even Lafayette doesn't know how much better it would be for Tara, if somebody would. "Fuck that. All the shit you've built up doesn't just go away because a hoodoo woman moves some rocks around on your belly." I am still in pain.

"I thought you said it worked?" Tara reminds him it was a con job by his own admission, but he shakes his head. That's not how it works. "Heifer, it's not a con job if you got your money's worth." She rolls her eyes, but he's right. "Hell, and who knows? It might do you some good too." She says she doesn't have \$445 left of bullshit money, but he's unconvinced. "You just saying that 'cause you don't understand it. And trust me, this world is filled with things we will never understand. Compared to a lifetime of Zoloft? 445's a bargain." Especially when it's getting worse. She looks at him.

-- Page 20 --

Sookie pops some B-12 in Sam's office, dumb on many levels, and Sam asks what she's up to; he's never seen her taking vitamins judiciously before. She never had a reason. "SO WHAT?" She asks, nasty. "YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ME PUT ON DEODORANT! OR WASH MY HAIR! OR FEED MY CAT! HAVE YOU? BUT I DO ALL THOSE THINGS! I DON'T NEED A PERMISSION SLIP FROM YOU!" He's like, the hell? He checks the shelf and realizes what it is: what he's taking from her, what she's giving away. He slams the bottle against the hearth in frustration, and the pills go everywhere. And he starts picking them up again.

Amy's off work and closed down when she gets in Jason's truck after the lunch shift; he tries on the Buddha for size. "Good day?" The thing that we say to the little woman, when our life together stretches into infinity. Amy rocks, calmly but on the edge, and spits it out: "I need V," she admits. "What? I thought you said you didn't need any again until... You needed it again." Um, yeah. "Well, I need it. Okay?" voice sharper now; he's unconvinced; he's high on something else. He is good, and wise, and no longer alone. Something like a replacement for Dawn, but without that betrayal, without the fangbanging, without the secrets: they do V together. Nothing hidden, everything permitted. "Look me in the eye. Tell me that you don't want it too." Well of course he does. It's the answer to everything, it's salvation. Me, you, the bed, the house. "Of course I do, but Lafayette won't sell it to me." Amy nods, and thinks, and all those lovely athletic muscles of her brain turn into something new. Squirrel eats nuts, snake eats the squirrel, gator eats the snake. Something's eating Amy.

Did you see *Southland Tales*? It's a gorgeous hot mess, like *Donnie Darko*, with a million threads you can follow. But the most heartwrenching was this: our boys come home and we give them God in a drug vial. Liquid karma. Sound familiar? And when they shoot it, oh, the

tawdry heavens they create: dancing girls and mugs of beer, skeeball and visions of their own unscarred faces. God's not the answer to your life, He's the question you spend your life asking: Amy's engineered her entire soul around an artificial state of life, and hasn't figured out a way to get there on her own. V blows the doors off the barn and introduces you to the bed, the house; opens up every passageway and fills it with love. And if she could do it on her own -- if she didn't need V -- she'd be halfway there. She could have love, and glory, and grace. But instead she's found salvation.

-- Page 21 --

There's strange music upstairs at Bill's; he puts his suit over the banister and zooms up to the bathroom, where the sound of dripping and a light under the door alert him to a curious visitor. He opens the door cautiously, sneaking around in his own house. Like Amy, like Tara. Eric lies in the bath, surrounded by candles, listening to something in Old Swedish, arrogant eyes closed to Bill's approach. "I texted you three times. Why didn't you reply?" Bill shrugs. "I hate using the number keys to type," he says honestly. Sometimes I like Bill. "What are you listenin' to?" Eric still hasn't looked up; he's a beast in the bath. "I have a favor to ask of you." A favor? Or an order? Eric finally opens his eyes, because that's the question and never the question: "Depends on how you look at it." Bill crosses his arms, considering him. "Honestly, did you think you could keep her to yourself?" He drops his eyes. No. No, he didn't.

*I watch you when you are sleeping, you belong to me*

Amy bites her thumbnail in the truck, watching, waiting for something. "Feels a little like stalking, don't it?" Not at all. Feels exactly like it: "It's the most natural thing in the world," she twitches, and fits her need into her philosophy. "The hunt. People used to do this all the time before we got complacent with cloned beef and prepackaged dinners." The way it slides so easily off the tongue, the way brains can take you places your heart knows better than to lead. Jason stares at her, then crouches down as Lafayette gets out of his car and Amy shivers. Jason Stackhouse, stalking Lafayette? You is a stupid bitch. Jason sits back up to start the truck, and her voice rings out. "Headlights off." He wonders how many times she's gone hunting before, and she tells him in other words: "Stay five lengths behind, ten if we get on the Parish Road." It was a flash flood. They were caught on the bridge down by the Parish Road and got swept out in the river. They couldn't save themselves. They'd found salvation.

Eddie the Vampire roams the living room in his cookie-cutter development house, lighting candles in his loneliness. There's a knock at the door, and he goes to it, nervous and in love, fussing with his hair. He's overweight, Stephen Root of the red Swingline stapler, cute but definitely what in my family we call a Third Husband. He breathes, and opens the door casually; his softness and his nervousness belie the strength and hunger in his bones. "Well hey there, sweetness," Lafayette purrs. "You ready to party?" The fangs come out immediately, as Eddie stares. "I'll take that as a yes. Nasty..." Lafayette draws his hand across Eddie's chest; it leaves ripples of hunger. In the living room, while Eddie pours him wine, Lafayette turns down the radio: "Eternal Flame," a song about desire and about the desire for desire to solve every equation. No flame's eternal. No salvation lasts.

-- Page 22 --

Lafayette notices Eddie standing at the door and smiles. "I bought this specially for you," Eddie says, obviously. Eddie doesn't drink wine. "I remember you said you Go for Merlot." Lafayette grins to himself. "I said I worked at Merlotte's, but whatever. Pour me some anyhow." Eddie swirls the wine, shows Lafayette the legs like he saw on TV. Eddie's life is from television: the way things are supposed to be, the salvation stories offer us. The hooker has a heart of gold, inner beauty overcomes all obstacles, people in love buy each other little gifts, bottles of wine, people in love sometimes mediate the heat of their passion by stretching it out, into dates every Monday, so that it doesn't burn them up. Eddie is a sad little, scary little case, though, because he's not just an average couch potato TV-watching loser, getting fatter and sadder as the lonely years go by: he's also hungry, and wild, and strong, and deadly. You might forget that, but rest assured Lafayette does not. Eddie's just like any other man.

Lafayette smells the wine and considers drinking it, as Eddie comes closer and closer to him, smelling at his skin, pulling at Lafayette's jeans. Poor old sad fucking Eddie, a god in human form, sitting on a couch as his brummagem lover spits the wine back in the glass. What would a vampire know about wine? He tries and tries, but he's just a dead body animated by desire; he bought the lies hook line and sinker. St. Valentine is the worst of our demons, because he tells us that our salvation depends on other people. On love, on the actions and the tokens of somebody else's appreciation. Everybody wants to be seen, to matter: St. Valentine of the Television tells us those two very different propositions are synonyms, and we sell him our souls without a thought.

"All right, baby. Eddie juice first. Then we play." Eddie sits back, sad -- but sad because the fantasy is gone, or because his hunger is deferred? Does he think one is the other? That's my read: all of this is an elaborate fetish, playing out the puppet games he thinks people play out, like on TV. And it pushes and rages against his natural desire, to fuck and rend and suck and bite and live. Again: same as you and me. But if we slept with everybody we were supposed to, nothing would ever get done. You have to prioritize! His salvation is humanity, and the grotesque approximation that Lafayette helps him talk himself into. He licks the vein on Eddie's arm, and it pops up. Tongue on skin. Eddie gasps, rolling inside it. Lafayette smiles and slips the needle in; that awful thing that always happens with syringes, when the blood backs out suddenly, in squirting thrust. "I always look forward to Monday nights. First *Heroes*, then... You." Lafayette looks seriously into his eyes: "Eddie. What fun is it being a vampire, if all you do is watch TV?"

-- Page 23 --

*Do you feel the same?  
Am I only dreaming?*

"Well, I like TV." Lafayette cares about this, though. When Eddie asks him to lie and say he loves him, we can see that's what he's saying now, to some small extent: he sees Eddie, Eddie matters. "I'm just saying, you should try the bars. I know you like getting laid, too..." Eddie leans back, breathing as Lafayette draws it out. "Why should I go to the bars? I got this." And is he wrong? Isn't that pretty much what Jason was doing, with the hot and cold running ass, or Maudette, reaching higher and higher into her pain? Why go looking for anything real, why risk the journey and the skinned knees and the truth about yourself, the lies of television exposed... when salvation arrives at your door every time you call?

"You like me, don't you, Lafayette?" Eddie's voice is desperate; Lafayette soothes him, strokes him with that voice; never forget that he is a beast. "I mean... even if I wasn't helping out with the blood, you'd still want me, right?" He strokes Lafayette's hand absentmindedly. This isn't the hooker with a heart of gold story. Every vampire is a serial killer, older than time and colder than the dead. Lafayette is a hostage; no matter how much control he's got, he still has to play by the rules. So this becomes a negotiation: not just keeping Eddie twisting on the line, but keeping him from ripping out your throat. Just like a man. "Why you even got to ask me that?" Because he is in love.

"I'd hate to think it's just business for you when you come over." Eddie is soft as a flower, running to wilt, afraid to look at Lafayette, who laughs conspiratorially but never takes his eyes off that monster's face: "Of course not. What, you think I fool around with all my business associates?" If you thought about the amount of time we spend putting our lives in other people's hands, you'd never leave the house. "Ah, there we go," he says, finally popping the vial into his cooler. "Now, show me what a dirty old vampire you is."

Eddie's intense. There is no giggling, no romance in his face. Of all the things about Eddie, and Eddie's got a lot of things, you can't say he ever giggled. His need is real, he's not some fop looking for a Jude Law to buy dinners and expensive clothes -- he's a guy in a house, full of hunger he can't control, lonely and afraid and sad and violently desirous. Somewhere TV told us that people like Eddie, non-camera-ready people who sit on the couch, that their desire wasn't real and painful and controlling and compulsory. On TV, when people are horny, it makes them even sexier. On TV, nudist colonies are full of people you wouldn't mind seeing naked.

-- Page 24 --

It's already healed, that scar. Eddie's hungry, leaning closer and closer, snapping like a dog at a steak, too hungry to eat. He kisses Lafayette, wildly, as though his life is beginning, as though Lafayette is a vein. And there aren't fireworks, or music, or a crowd of people watching and remembering their own lost loves. It's just two men in a sad house, with the Bangles in the background, about to exchange some loveless sodomy for drugs and lies. And when you stop looking at love as salvation, that stops looking like a nightmare and becomes recognizable. It doesn't mean Lafayette doesn't love him, even beyond the implied threat of his existence. It just means the kind of love he's looking for doesn't exist.

Eddie nearly weeps, so hungry he could crawl out of his skin and through to yours. Hungry for blood, and hungry for Lafayette's body, and hungry most of all to the answer to his loneliness; like any man, he can't really tell the differences between them. "I want you so bad," he says, nearly in tears with the enormity of his need. "I ache." Lafayette pulls his face back, by the hair, and stands. He takes Eddie's hands awkwardly, and pulls him up off the couch, and leads him away into the house. These are the deals that we make.

*A whole life so lonely, and then you come and ease the pain  
I don't want to lose this feeling*

Sookie sits in the car outside Fangtasia!, pissed and holding a bouquet, per Lisa's instruction, from Bill: red roses and one white. When she said she wanted to go out, she clarifies, "I did not mean Fangtasia!. I mean really. All those pathetic people who come here looking for sex with vampires?" Who think it means salvation, no matter how many times their lives are threatened. Who are willing to take the risk, go right up to the door of death

and knock, rather than be alone one more second. Bill grins at her hypocrisy: "I know. It's despicable!"

"Didn't even have the decency to ask me himself," Sookie mutters, and Bill puts a fourth spin on the phrase: "You are mine. He didn't need to ask your permission." Sookie hisses that Eric can't check her out like a library book, and Bill regretfully informs her that yes, he can. "Eric is Sheriff of Area 5... It's a position of great power among our kind. We do not want to anger him. As long as the requests are reasonable, we should accede to his wishes." These are the deals that we make, too. She sniffs her roses and rolls his eyes and is adorable; Bill is pleased until she tosses them onto the carseat and snarls her way out of the car. She looks amazing, she's total fangbait again: white, soft dress and sweater, those amazing breasts once again on display. Smart girl.

-- Page 25 --

"I had this crazy dream this morning. We were sitting, eating breakfast, and all of a sudden the sunlight set you on fire." We will never sleep beside each other, we will never have breakfast together, because we are a family and because you do not eat, and because breakfast happens across the meridian. He knows what she means, all of it, and fidgets with his keys. "It wouldn't happen quite that way." She looks at him; the coldness of this, the way he's a man and a beast and a dead thing, all at once. "The sunlight would severely weaken me. And eventually, of course, I would die. But I wouldn't burst into flames." Is that good enough? "Not right away, at least." She rolls her eyes at another crack in the foundation. The one man in all creation that she could be with.

Tara creeps toward the hedge-witch's bus. The nature is so loud out here, a thousand creatures chirping and buzzing and hissing and sliding and fucking and eating and dying in the night. It's deafening past the crossroads. Standing at the door, listening to the world, she hears a crack and turns: Miss Jeanette, beautiful and crooked, smiling at her proudly. "I knew you'd come. Let's go inside."

The guy at the nudist -- sorry, "naturist" -- colony outside Beaumont goes all the way back to the Sixties looking for the Merlottes, but there's nothing. Andy, disappointed, says goodbye, and because it's Texas the guy invites him to their monthly naked barbecue. Andy hangs up without giving what you would call a firm RSVP one way or the other.

Pam reclines against the bar -- yes! -- in a cute pink sweater, hair soft, makeup normal, nothing dominatrixy about her; Bill is next to her looking suspicious and worried or else that's just his face; Eric prowls around the bar in a black tank top; Sookie sits at a table in the middle of the room. Eric explains the favor. He, Pam and Long Shadow are partners in Fangtasia! They recently noticed \$60,000 gone from the books. He indicates Bruce, a sweating chubby human accountant at the table, who is freaking the fuck out.

"Perhaps you can listen to him," Eric says, and Sookie gets snotty with him as usual, plus the rage that is bubbling ever Tara-closer to the surface: "He's not saying anything."

You have to know him, and we don't, or at least the actor, to understand how charmed he is by this. His lovely face is palsied with the effort to control his old, old hunger, and his smile is a threat, but there's a twinkle in his eyes that says there is maybe one person in Area 5, human or not, who is packing just enough game to talk this shit to him without getting

kicked across the room, and that's because he is a pragmatist, just like Sookie, and realizes that every time she opens her mouth, what she's really saying is, "Fuck you for being the boss, and fuck you for putting me in a cage by dint of your existence." She could walk away from all of this, and Eric wouldn't have a call on her, do you see? She only belongs to Bill, she's only "mine," for as long as she says it's true. At least at this point. So she can afford to tell Eric to fuck off, because she's only visiting. She's only kept there by her heart, and not her blood.

-- Page 26 --

"Don't be coy. It's humbling enough to turn to a human for assistance. We know what you can do." So then why not fucking glamour him? Eric respects her more than that, and asks her to fucking chill out because obviously they would have tried that already. "So," he says a little more strongly, asserting his authority in the room, "It would be a great favor to me -- and to Mr. Compton -- if you help us." Sookie asks what happens to the culprit when she finds him, and from the bar creepy old Long Shadow assures her they'll turn him over to the human authorities. "Hundreds of years old and you're still a terrible liar. Come on." She looks up at Eric, willing to deal with demons directly. She's been doing it her whole life. We look at her gifts as a handicap a lot of the time, but knowing the worst thing about every single person in Bon Temps has to give you some confidence in negotiation, right? It's like your intuition taking V. "I'll make you a deal. If you promise to hand over the person who did this to the police, I'll agree to help you... Any time you want." That shaking, terrible, barely controlled smile, and eyes that say she's the bee's knees: "Why not?" Sookie reaches across the table for Bruce.

*(Shit what's this crazy bitch doing why did I agree to work for vampires goddamn it I knew it was a bad idea been nothing but straight with these fuckers gotta be an idiot to steal from them Jesus Christ I was the one who reported it...) Sookie's natural kindness takes the reins from her rage and, having shared his mind, can't be bothered to be angry any more. She's naturally Good Cop, thanks to a lifetime playing off Tara and Jason both, but this is about him. "Bruce, it's okay, take a deep breath. Did you steal their money?" He shivers and quakes and swears he didn't, babbling, and she calms him, shushing. "Do you know who did?" (I wish, I would turn that fucker in so fast couldn't have been Ginger she's too dumb although she's hot as shit I'd fuck her if I could) And that's enough of that: Sookie tells Eric he's clean.*

Long Shadow coughs. "You trust the skinny human to clear the fat one?" Bill watches Eric breathe, and nod. Yes, he trusts the skinny human. She's guileless; vulnerability as power, passive mindreading as the ultimate aggression: Sookie's a Steel Magnolia because she has no other options than complete honesty. This has been her most dishonest day, and her most insanely disclosing day too, but even so. If she had anything to hide, she would hide it, or at least make the attempt not to be a bitch whenever she opens her mouth. You know what I mean? She's not scared, but she's not dissembling either. Bill practically cries, relieved, as Eric nods his approval of Sookie and orders the next human brought in.

-- Page 27 --

"The Fourth Man In The Fire," by Johnny Cash, starts playing on Jason's radio as they wait for Lafayette to leave Eddie's; Amy plays crazily with her hair. The song's about salvation; about the thing that's with you even when you're being destroyed, that reminds you to come home. They forgot that. It was a flash flood. They watch him drive away, and Amy starts going through her purse. She wraps the silver lariat around her neck, and Jason asks

what her plan is: will they buy the man's blood? "Just remember your lines, that's all I need from you. I'll handle the rest." Jason's all, *I am going to end up having gay sex tonight, I just know it* and Amy's like, shut up. "I know you probably don't think I'm all that smart, but I do know that that vampire can kill us both before we even get in the door." She breathes, grossed out; she breathes out fear and breathes in the hunt. Jason looks down in her purse, and sees the new weapon inside, jumping in horror. This is premeditated. Get out of there, Stackhouse.

Eddie watches, rapt, as Reverend Newlin speaks. His hair is John Edwards shiny, his looks are Congressional Page immaculate. I kind of want to take a bite out of him, and I'm not even a vampire. His father died a few weeks ago, if you'll remember, after advocating his hate agenda a little too loudly with Nan *whats-her-face*, in a horrible car accident in Dallas. "...While the wing nuts on the left keep pushing their so-called Vampire Rights legislation, I'm more concerned with basic *Human* rights. The right for our sons and daughters to go to school without fear of molestation by a bloodthirsty predator, in the playground or in the classroom." Eddie rolls his eyes, but keeps them on Newlin, hungrily. "Someone has got to take a stand for public safety over permissiveness and immorality!" Ask yourself what's on the nose here: the use of the rhetoric, or the rhetoric itself? Something has to be said a bajillion times, no matter how retarded it is, before it becomes a cliché in the first place.

The host of the show Eddie's watching laughs at the clip: "If you ask me, he's protesting a little too hard," she says, and Eddie laughs. "Come out of the closet, Reverend Steve! I know plenty of friendly vampires who'd like to take a bite out of you." Eddie bites his lip, running hands across his skin. "Oh, but truly, it's inflammatory talk from folks like Steve Newlin who make me ashamed to call myself a human," she says, as the hilarious, campy, sad cable-access organ music starts up. "Thanks for watching, we'll be bite back!" See, when everybody has their own channel you get some shitty programming, but I don't even want to get started on that one because wow does that rant get offensive real fast.

-- Page 28 --

Eddie's doorbell rings and he turns off the TV; at the door stands Jason Stackhouse, like a pizza only very much better; it's only just post-primetime, so I'd say it's about breakfast time. "I'm a friend of Lafayette Reynolds. He sent me? For you?" Jason smiles nervously, giggles that way he has when he's wondering how gay things are about to get; Eddie opens the door and Amy throws a chainmail mask over his face. It starts to steam and smoke immediately, and the screams are very human underneath it. Jason freaks out, but she moves him out of the way, binding Eddie's hands and feet with silver, ignoring him until he says her name aloud and she nearly slaps him. Eddie begs for his life and she slams his head against the floor; they carry him out to Jason's truck and load him up, screaming all the way, begging for his life. Eddie, begging for his life of couches and TV and prostitutes, and they don't even hear him.

"Strange Love" started with Kelly and Brad and a hand job, and ended with Mack and Denise. This episode started with holy pilgrims, kissing in bed, walking in each other's most exalted places; this is what happens when you think you've found salvation. Everything becomes its opposite whether or not you're there to ride the change, but if you ever let yourself think you're allowed to rest, to stop, something in you will crack, and sicken, and die.

"This is the last of our humans," says Pam, some time later, and oh, what a shining example she is. Meet Ginger, who's wearing a garment that wouldn't be up to Leeloo's structural integrity code, made out of shiny stripper crap. I didn't know they had regular strippers at Fangtasia!, although I never really looked at the servers either so maybe they all dress like that. Ginger does a fairly good impression of being what she is, which is disgusting trash, and hits on Bill on her way to sitting down and being really hostile to Sookie, but eventually thinking enough thoughts that Sookie realizes she's clean, but knows who did it. "What? Fuck you!" (*Shit how'd she know I didn't tell anyone I swear fuck he's gonna kill me*) Sookie asks who's going to kill her, and presses harder, and tells Eric it's just blank, like an erased memory; the four vampires look at each other and just as Pam and Sookie realize she's been glamourised, meaning the thief is a vampire, Ginger's eyes dart to Long Shadow and Sookie stands, terrified. But it's already too late, because duh he is a vampire, so he leaps over the bar and jumps her, hands around her throat and teeth out and ready.

-- Page 29 --

I don't know, guys. I know this is the eighth episode to end with Sookie Stackhouse dying, and yet never quite dying, but I think this time she might *really be in trouble*.

## DURE TOUTE LA VIE

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 9 | Aired on 11.02.2008

*Plaisir D'Amour* - Those lovable drug addicts Jason and Amy declare their love for each other over the screams of their captive; Bill pays the price for saving Sookie from Long Shadow; Sam pays the price of Tara's exorcism and finally comes out of the Canine Closet.

Bill stakes Long Shadow as he's strangling Sookie, unleashing a *truly fucked-up* amount of blood and vampire parts all over the place, Vampire Pam and Sookie Stackhouse have a total Vibe, and the killer gets Tina the cat, stealing her kitty-cat head and strapping her kitty-cat body to the ceiling fan in the foyer, so it can spray kitty-cat blood everywhere.

Sam comes to apologize to Tara for the Tennis Grunting convo, but she's in the middle of a fight with her mother about masturbation and the Million Man March and doesn't have time for his mess. Later on -- just before Sookie learns about their affair, and reacts as well as can be expected -- he pays for her exorcism, because Miss Jeanette has convinced her that she is possessed by exactly \$799.95 worth of demon.

The other thing the staking unleashes is a political shitstorm for Eric, who regrettably must do the Sherriffy thing and take Bill away to some shadowy Tribunal with Zeljko Ivanek doing his Silver Fox thing next week. He also issues a general warning to Royce's boys and the others who have recently done vamps wrong, like the insane/awesome Amy, who:

Still has Eddie tied up in Jason Stackhouse's basement, makes a delightful picnic in the sunlight while they listen to him scream, and fucks Jason in front of him after drinking his blood. Amy Burley, you scamp! Jason slowly, slowly begins to understand that capturing and bleeding a person to death is -- at the least -- tacky, but manages to piss off Rene and alienate Hoyt and Lafayette after suffering more workplace mood swings. He has a very sweet, very long conversation with Eddie, and decides that he is awesome. However, the implications of that information -- and the obvious ethical issues involved -- are still traveling toward his brain at press time.

Bill and Sookie kiss in a way we're told to find romantic, and Bill tasks Sam Merlotte with taking care of Sookie while he's away. Sam knows what he means, and unless you *really* haven't been paying attention, so do you. You know who hasn't been paying attention? Sookie, who goes to bed with a border collie but wakes up with Sam Merlotte sleeping at the foot of the bed... in all his naked shapeshifter glory.

*Check back Friday for our full detailed recap. Until then, watch [video](#) and discuss this episode in our [forums](#).*

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Long Shadow is all up on it, choking the shit out of Sookie and everybody staring, Ginger screaming, Bill freaking out, Pam and Eric drinking mint juleps and grinning. Finally Pam's like, "Ginger, *enough*." Eric thanks her, and before you know it, Bill has zoomed over with a broken-off beertap and staked the shit out of him. Guess that part wasn't propaganda, but then given the way vampires work in this universe -- blood boudin sausages in sexy skin casings -- it wouldn't be. What happens next is difficult to deal with.

Long Shadow explodes in a hot rain, blood pouring out of his mouth and into Sookie's, turning her white dress red ("Not pink, not green, not aquamarine!") and then going from total barf to used-up, popped-balloon skin sack, and then to a mess of gristle and bloody elastic cartilage on the floor. That's what they're like, Sookie. That's what's inside, like Adam's second wife: just a sack of skin, holding blood. Even Buffy would barf.

Which is exactly what Ginger does, everywhere, as Bill stares worried at Eric and Pam stares at him, shocked. "Humans," Eric sniffs. "Honestly, Bill, I don't know what you see in them." Sookie shakes, and looks in his eyes, gasping. Bill is worried. There's blood in her mouth. It tastes like God.

The difference between killing the possum and loving the possum is immense. Sookie dealt with her shit the right way, even if Bill took it the rest of the way by killing Bartlett. Jason deals with his shit in precisely half the right way, but unfortunately it's not the best half, because he's still letting everybody else drive. Vampires are a big deal because here's what they're saying all the time, touched by the numinous: "You're fucked up about sex," they say, "You're fucked up about death. Deal with it. I'm not going anywhere." If you're smart enough to realize there's a problem -- if you don't let the secret bad shit hound you to death, like Jason is -- your first instinct is to sacrifice it, outside yourself. Put it in a possum, or set the house on fire; whatever it takes to demonstrate that you are saying NO to the secret scary bad shit. Turns out, even if your behavior changes, you still haven't recovered any ground. You haven't gotten bigger. In fact, you've gotten smaller, by walling off another room in your house.

Slightly better than that is the Maudette Pickens way, the way of all fangbangers, which will get your ass killed. That's where, realizing you're fucked up about sex, or death, you dive in with your hands open, and don't come up for air until you've played out the same patterns as many times as it takes. But the way human beings work is, we only play out those patterns over and over because we honestly think we can fix it. This time, we can fix it. And as it doesn't work, over and over and over, we get more intense, more into extremity, closer to the edge. At no point does it seem to work out, but we keep trying. By concretizing our secret bad shit just by dint of their existence, vampires fool us into thinking our secret bad shit is itself concrete: that our weirdness about sex has a real-world workbook we can fill out and solve, on each other's bodies. That's an understandable, if very creepy, fallacy. Maudette is just Sookie with a lack of pattern recognition or symbolic sense; Sookie changes and her world gets bigger, while Maudette gets herself killed. That's the line that Jason's riding, even now.

-- Page 2 --

It's so much easier to assign one-to-one correspondences to everything and everyone on earth, like last week: Amy is a psychopath, therefore retroactively and proactively nothing she does is worth anything. When she tells you she loves you, she's playing you. How do we know this? Because on an unrelated note she's talked herself into believing that Eddie is not a real person. The irony couldn't be clearer: we do to Amy what Amy does to Eddie, and assume that everything she says is a lie. We fall prey to binary thinking and say, "Because X, we must always assume Y." Which is a fine way to go through life -- most of us do, a lot of the time -- but I think it cheapens our experience of both life and other people, not to mention this story. Which takes pains to offer contradictory input that we must nevertheless accept, acknowledge and transcend.

Jason spends the entire episode bouncing back and forth between Amy World, in which everything but vampires is sacred, and Jason World, in which the evidence of his eyeballs, and the grace of Eddie, his love of Eddie, rub up against Amy World like sandpaper on skin. The first colors in alchemy are black and white. Jason and Sookie especially are doing a pretty good job of jumping back and forth across the line, and I feel that Sam of all people is helping Tara get it, but the endpoint isn't bouncing back and forth: it's holding the contradiction in your hands, both at once, on fire, and being able to see the world as big enough to have them both. That's the endpoint of alchemy: a world big enough to contain even gold. And a huge part of this is recognizing the infinite number of rooms in our little houses: just because some birds are blackbirds doesn't necessarily mean all birds are irrefutably black, but by the same token it's irrefutably true that most of us fall prey to fatigue when faced with the idea of looking at every single bird as we encounter it.

Pam finds it funny, for example. Even as Sookie's squeezing blood out of her hair, into the sink, with kreepy krazy Kewpies on the walls -- even a kute little vampire one! -- in the bathroom. She shivers, while outside Ginger is pulling the arteries and crap, I don't even know what, of Long Shadow's remains off her jacket and shoes. Well, I think. To be honest I have no idea what she's doing, and neither does she, and she keeps screaming the *whole* time, and finally Eric's like, "Um, when she is finished acting like *America's Next Top Crackhead*, would you please glamour the shit out of her? Again?" Pam wonders if there's enough Ginger left to glamour, because in case you haven't noticed, taking over somebody's soul and choices is sort of horrifying and Bartlett-y leaves a footprint that affects everything after, and Eric's like, "The alternative is turn her, and she'd make a sucky vampire, due to be a functionally retarded strip-stitute, so... Ya want her?" Pam, unimpressed and fangs on edge due to the unending screeching from Ginger, who sucked to start with, is like, "I'm not desperate enough to turn that bitch. Glamour it is." Eric takes Bill to have a 'Blood...

-- Page 3 --

And it beeps in the microwave. Out of the spotlight, off that throne and in the backroom, Eric's dead person makeup makes him look completely silly, like a cast member in the Broadway revival of *Sweeney Todd*. (Which BTW my BFF Will took me to see Halloween weekend because he's smart enough to ignore my musical theatre allergy, and it was so, so good. You know how this show is like, half brilliant people you've seen elsewhere and half brilliant people that all knew each other at Juilliard? It's like that. There's no orchestra, just them being totally awesome and playing sixteen instruments while singing all awesome and acting... like they're in a Broadway musical, which is a whole thing unto itself that they do very well. I can't believe I'm saying this, but go see it because it is so, so good. Trust Will. Trust him.) Eric watches Bill drink the TruBlood and then makes so, so much fun of him.

"How do you stomach that stuff? Don't you find it metallic and vile?" Bill says it's just sustenance, the symptom of mainstreaming and perhaps the ethical sidestep of all time: what's easier than the pretence of salvation that TruBlood provides? "Oh, I couldn't help but murder or glamour or objectify my lunch until such time as the Japanese weirdos -- as usual -- invented a way around all those icky feelings of accountability?" My friend's husband went vegetarian, randomly, awhile back, for the very logical reasons that we all go vegetarian awhile back, and the sort of ethical morass that leads one into has always fascinated me, because it seems a very specific way of limiting thought to a black and white yes/no when you do it like that. But here the metaphor is very real and pretty central, given

what happens to Eddie: what if we start right now, and all the blood I've drunk is okay because of the cultural possum called TruBlood?

I mean, I don't want to go into a vegetarian thing because to me it is very simply across-the-board borderline, but only because it's very important to me to draw the line between intellect as *quality* and intellect as *virtue*, one of the reasons I find it very easy to love Jason Stackhouse but something that's really hard and gets harder the smarter you are. If one of the strongest struts in your scaffolding is your intelligence (or your beauty, or your rage) -- and especially if you feel like it's all you have -- you're going to look at that thing as a virtue; as an excuse for your existence. Like that old joke where the woman screams at the mugger, "Don't kill me, I'm a writer!" WTF. But -- and I'm talking about Tara as much as anybody else here -- it's a lot easier to get over yourself when you look at intelligence the same way you look at beauty, or height, or eye color: being smart is easy, but being good is hard. If we each said that ten times in the mirror everyday I daresay we'd all be a lot more compassionate: being smart is handed to you, being good is handed to *nobody*.

-- Page 4 --

Eric smiles joyfully at Bill, with his, "I don't think about the taste of TruBlood, it's sustenance," and as usual Bill doesn't understand irony or delight until it's explained to him: "If you're their poster boy, the mainstreaming movement is in very deep trouble. *TruBlood: It keeps you alive, but it will bore you to death.*" Bill sits, following his lead, and asks to cut to the chase. Specifically, what is the Sheriff of Area Five going to do about the vamp-on-vamp crime that just happened? "I'll take the girl," Eric suggests, and Bill -- too fast to stop himself, and despairing the second he's said it -- shouts, "No!" Eric looks at him appraisingly, as though any of this is a surprise to him at all, and Bill shakes his head, looking down. "You can have anyone you want, why do you want her?" Um, because she's magic? Eric is like, "You totally like her in that way!" and Bill refuses to answer: "*Sookie Must Be Protected.*" Eric grins, talking about shit we don't get but with vocalized capitals flying: "Now, that sounds like an Edict. But it couldn't be, because I would know about that." Bill won't look at him, because to look would be to answer the question Eric already knows the sunshine-sucking answer to. He tells Bill to admit his love for Sookie, but he changes the subject again: "If I hadn't done what I did, would you have let his disloyalty stand?" Eric points out that whatever he did do, he wouldn't have done it in front of witnesses, especially vampire ones, because Eric is smarter than Bill, because Eric watches *Gossip Girl*, which is to say Eric knows that the difference between what we do in front of people and what we do when we're alone is as different as night and day and life and death, especially for the undead. Bill feels dumb, which he should, because *Gossip Girl* is awesome.

Not so awesome is the bullshit Jason's doing, which is a truism but is true right this second because what he's doing is driving with Eddie trussed up in his truckbed, moaning and screaming, hurting all over, bound in silver for no crime larger than his existence and his desire. "All I'm saying is, Lafayette didn't have to kidnap him. And I'm pretty sure he left with some V..." Amy laughs and tells him he's free to take the Lafayette route, if he's got the balls to blow a vamp. Jason realizes, for the fifth time, that this is not Amy's first ride on the junkie depersonalization/compartmentalization train, and she's like, "What? Who? Hey look, something shiny! Sound of jingling keys! Get the mouse, Murray! Here's my boob!" He tells her that the giant purse, or "Big Bag O' Crazy," was her giveaway, because "any woman with a purse that big is bound to have something in it" he never wanted to know about, and she's like, "Ooh, I'm sleepy... Listen to the radio!"

Sookie, just like half of every episode, is still scrubbing blood off something, in this case herself, and finally Pam comes in with some of her dominatrix gear. Sookie puts on her usual "Vampires are like homeless people holding grenades and asking for change" face and thanks her for the thought. "I'm fine. Really. I'm just gonna dry out my hair and be on my way..." Pam shakes her head and explains that her boyfriend and Eric are going to be talking and bitching at each other for a bajillion years until somebody breaks out the yardstick, and also: *You're supercute, bitch, but I'm not actually being nice. I'm gonna need you to change the fuck out of your bloody-ass clothes before you walk out of my club. The vampire club I'm now half-owner of, in which a vampire murder just happened. Those clothes are getting burnt up, say goodbye to them, thank you ma'am. Savvy?*

Sookie gets it, and Pam apologizes by being Totally Awesome. "There's vampire in your cleavage," she says, grinning, and Sookie looks down. "Ah. Okay, ew," she says, jumping. "Allow me," says Pam, and then totally vampirically reaches down in there and gets it out. They look into each other's eyes and Sookie, who is incapable of being glamoured but is still susceptible to awesomeness in its undiluted form, doesn't look away, just whispers softly, "Thank you." Pam, who's on like lesbian signifier five at this point, just reiterates the second thing she ever said, which is that she thinks Sookie is totally great, but because she's a vampire she has to be as creepy as possible: "I'm beginning to understand the fuss everyone's making over you." Sookie stares at Pam, but not like she's intimidated or scared or creeped, just like, "Oh, we're kind of friends, like that lady the tiger hugged on YouTube. Okay, then: I am in fucking dire straits. You need to help me right away, because I am thirteen kinds of in over my head."

Speaking of, right then the glamoured pieces of Ginger that are left -- Pickled Ginger? -- come lurching in, more like an animated dead thing than any vampire we've seen. Her eyes roll and bug out like a frightened horse, or like a coked up waitress, and she grins, introducing herself. I watched this entire sequence over and over in slow-motion because Holy Moses is she fucked-up looking. This actress is amazing, I mean her face literally stretches into crazy areas never before seen housing face. Like Lettie Mae, or ... you know how *Dexter*'s ugly sister got famous by doing all that *Emily Rose* shit? Like that. Like there's a spider doing calisthenics behind her face. "Oh, you don't have to be so scared. They're really very nice here!" Sookie watches her go. (And yes, all the Long Shadow in her tummy is going to have an effect, although we haven't talked about it and might never, and yes, I have confirmed that, um, vampire bodily fluids -- since they're all blood, and thus V -- have similar effects no matter which mucus membrane they... Ugh, I can't talk about this. Suffice to say all of Sookie's stomping madness and CONSTANT COMPLIMENTS TO ARLENE'S HAIR are as much due to her crossing society's lines, so to speak, as Jason's per os dosage, and that is all I am EVER going to say about it, because thinking about that makes me want to vomit my entire stomach up so hard it'll hit the moon.)

The camera goes crazy again, doing that Goyer jumpcutty-stroby thing like at the beginning during the intense bloodletting, and it's all BSG-crazy hustling poor Eddie into the basement, setting up camp, covering the windows, tying him to the chair, taping down an arm for the IV, I mean it's disgusting but well-choreographed on the parts of our little Rattray 2.0's, and Amy finds time -- in the middle of this hideous behavior -- to crack wise on Jason for the gasmasks he has in his unrealistic Louisiana basement. He admits to

getting paranoid after 9/11, and she laughs, because obviously Bon Temps was the next target after New York and DC, but neither of them acknowledge the elephant in the room, which is that Louisiana was the next target. His parents died in a flood.

Eddie asks what the heck they're planning on doing, and Jason admits he was wondering the same, but Amy isn't feeling these kind of questions. The plan? "We're gonna drink from him." And then what? Eddie's face is scarred and awful, asking alongside him, and Jason snarls: "Dude, I got this." What he's saying is, "I am Super Mario, scrolling ever rightward, jumping barrels and mushrooms in my attempt to ignore what the fuck is really going on here, and every word you speak, like a person, is just another mushroom guy I have to jump over." What he's saying is, "Poip!"

"Jason," she says, tying off Eddie's arm, "Can you please try to live in the now with me?" Jason points out that The Now is all he knows: "In fact, I've gone entire months without thinking about shit." Eddie moans. "But the truth is, right now? The Now kind of sucks. And if we both can't admit that, then we are 100% fucked." Jason slumps to the floor beside her, and she pulls off a drop or two from the rich and broken beertap she's just turned Eddie into. "Who wants the first taste?" Jason swears he's not touching it -- not like this -- and Eddie stupidly thanks him. Jason: "I said fucking *poip!*, motherfucker." Amy calls to him like a siren: "Come with me, baby. Don't let your fear get in your way..." I love Amy's wording in this scene: V, the thing that makes you present and undeniably real, even in her own vernacular more present than presence, is now and also a place you can go to, where you can forget all the evil that you do.

-- Page 7 --

"Look, it ain't fear, all right? It's just..." he whispers in her ear. "He's looking me right in the eye." Another barrel I can't jump. She shrugs and says she'll see him when she gets back; when she drops it Eddie closes his eyes. How gross to actually be there and feel yourself spreading through their muscles like that? She can't even stay vertical. Jason's impressed, turned on, curious, into it, watching her, and Jason watches Eddie looking at her, as she pulls off another dose. "Come on, baby. Come with me..." And Eddie, stupidly, tosses another barrel, begging him not to do it. Which is all it takes. "I said don't talk to me," Jason hisses, and toasts him with it. Eddie sadly watches as Jason drops the thimble of his blood, and reaches out for a moment to touch her hair before falling back, hands in the air, like a statue.

Tara sits in Miss Jeanette's voice, still wondering which side to fall on. Was it a possum or was it a heist? Why does it still hurt? Why can't she forget, like Lettie Mae? Is that a demon? "You were here. You saw it." Tara nods, but wants something concrete. Which is never going to fly, and she's grabbing at straws. Frankly the whole conversation creeps me out because it seems to betray a basic inability to understand how you yourself work, which is to say that it's neither and it's both. We live in a symbolic universe where everything is both magical and mundane. When you fall in love, that's taking energy out of yourself and putting it somewhere else; when you hate something impossibly you're doing the same thing. Crone-stone or rehab group session, you're still taking the bad scary stuff out and looking at it honestly, which is all it requires. Singing the night that made you: in the symbolic universe where we spend our waking and sleeping hours, the Quest isn't a metaphor for therapy -- therapy is a metaphor for the Quest.

"Fine, then. It's like this. Your mind, your... Your body, it's just a physical manifestation of your soul. And your soul is sick." Tara says that no, her "soul" is actually preoccupied with not getting ripped off. Miss Jeanette nods. "How's your Momma doing?" Tara admits she's doing great, but then, Lettie Mae believes in "shit like this," and Tara doesn't. Instead of pointing to the bus, the sky, her bra, the rocks, electricity, Miss Jeanette goes for the logical argument: "If you don't believe, then why'd you come all the way out here tonight?" Because we desire wholeness, because we know there's a better world than being afraid, because there is something in us that wants to be whole and won't stop until we try. She has no answer. "How much it'll cost me?" Miss Jeanette tells her, without hesitation: "\$799.95." Tara's as shocked by the quick answer as by the amount, but Jeanette's sanguine: "Cup of rum's on the house." Prices like that, it better be.

-- Page 8 --

Tara protests that Lettie Mae paid less than half of that, which proves nothing except that Tara is a soft-sciences genius, because  $\$445 > \$800/2$  no matter how you do it, but whatever. Here's the important part: "What I do takes varying amounts of energy, and involves varying amounts of risk. Now, what you got inside you is much more powerful than what your mama had. Much more dangerous, too." Tara can't believe it, and gets angry: "I once found that woman on the ground, eating her own vomit 'cause she didn't wanna waste the alcohol she lost bringing it all up." And how much better did you feel about yourself, watching that happen? Knowing there were places you wouldn't go?

Miss Jeanette just looks away and down, because what a gross fucking thing to say, here of all places. She shrugs. "Think about it. But not for too long. You can't afford to keep pushing people away. Your loneliness is spreading to your eyes. It's becoming a part of who you are." This last so forcefully that Tara shivers and sips her rum. Jeanette's got her. "Next time you're alone, stand in the mirror and count backwards from ten. If you can get all the way down to zero, then I'm wrong. But if you can't stand your own company for ten seconds, how you gonna expect to do it for the rest of your life?" Tara nearly starts to weep.

Sookie walks up her driveway looking shockingly hot in Pam's short black-pleather dominatrix dress, asking Bill if he's really going to be okay after his talk with Eric. "A simple slap on the wrist," he says. "That's all." Sookie asks if he's not in fact bullshitting, based on her convo with Pam, and Bill leads her delicately and sweetly up the steps by her wrist, scoffing hilariously: "Pam was turned almost a hundred years ago, and yet somehow still behaves as though every day were Halloween." Um, yeah. The *definition* of awesome. Mainstreaming and not mainstreaming are equally for pussies. "She's all drama and theatrics. I assure you, everything's gonna be fine." THE WORDS OF DEATH! Thanks, Compton.

Bill opens the screen door for her, and she unlocks the door, entering the dark house with one thought on her mind: a shower. "I still feel like there's blood all over me..." she says, flipping on a light switch to reveal a wall *entirely dripping with blood*; Bill takes in the scene and shouts, "Don't look up!" So of course she looks up: Tina the housecat, headless, strapped to the ceiling fan, spinning around and around, and shooting huge spurts of blood *directly at Sookie's just-scrubbed face*. I mean, my God.

-- Page 9 --

This show started like a day ago and she's already: been entirely bathed in blood at least ten times, got fucked with a dead man's dirty dick in a graveyard, saw what she thought was Boyfriend Soup, reads the grody thoughts of Andy Bellefleur on the regular, lost a friend and her only stable relative in like one day, got/literally murdered by meth addicts, drank vampire blood multiple times, got smacked around by her own brother, went from being a total pariah to being whatever pariahs spit on, went to retarded Fangtasia! twice, broke up with her best friend for literally no reason with her head in an oven and high on EZ-Off fumes, got nearly choked to death on two occasions -- once by a vampire and once by a Hep D-infected Daisy Dukes-wearing fangbanger, which BTW is a disease so fucked up it's imaginary -- saw a yucky smack-ho blowjob when she was still totally a virgin, has lost entire quarts mid-coitus... I mean, I would be showing the motherfucking strain, wouldn't you? Sookie needs a damn nap, is what she needs. Where the eff is that valium?

Jason's about to put it in, maybe for the first time, when Amy's like, "Wait, wait, wait," all slow and drunk still, with that same song from the truck playing. "First we have to thank the vampire for the gifts that he's bestowed upon us," she says, like Eddie is fucking venison. Listen, I live in Austin. I get it. And yes, carbon footprint is often at odds to aspirational eating disorders, and you have to pick what kind of asshole you are. Macrobiotic, while it strikes the correct aesthetic balance between fuel and health, means you can't stop talking about eating macrobiotic and doing fucking Ashtanga. Guess what? Thanking the spirit of the buffalo before you bite into that burger doesn't do a fucking thing. It's dead. You're alive. Own that. Jason breathes, unable to look at Eddie, but only because he's overcome by pleasure. By that intense feeling of connection that finds a blank spot where Eddie used to be. "We are grateful..." she says -- to a quick and lovely "Fuck you!" from my man Eddie -- "...For your gift to us." They ignore him; they start to fuck. It feels like God. Eddie feels it too.

Things get all kind of weird-failed-Oliver-Stone-postmodern for awhile. The forest appears behind them, opening up like an unending iris, psychotropic, psychedelic. Eddie's so young. They're swimming naked through the world. Somebody asks where they are and somebody says, "Nowhere. Everywhere. Together." Fucking in the sky, in flight over a never-ending forest, hair dancing underwater. In the bellybutton of the world, in the heart of the sun. In the middle of Eddie's pain. How could something so beautiful contain cruelty, or ugliness? How could there be anything less than perfect, in this perfect world? This is just the hunt, isn't it? He doesn't have feelings. Thank the buffalo. But this is the difference Lafayette kept trying to explain, which is that you can't let message get confused with medium, because in the real world when you start requiring it you begin to rot: two naked drug addicts, fucking on a dirty mattress in the basement while a tortured, beautiful creature of God watches, weeping tears of blood, bound in silver, his precious blood pouring out onto the floor one angelic drop at a time, useless and ugly, wasted as beauty, while they moan and fuck, insensate in their salvation.

-- Page 10 --

Bill spoons Sookie in a preposterous dressing gown, naked from the knees, asking why she won't sleep. Isn't she tired? She's had a motherfucker of the last nine episodes. She's like, "Yeah, but my death Grandmother has kind of been on my mind and if I weren't all fucked up on V I would have noticed that. Also my dead cat just sprayed blood all over me from where her head used to be, so. He gets all antebellum about how he is all about protecting her, and she explains that it's not *being* protected but needing to be protected is the issue, that wanting to be protected makes her feel "like the helpless little girl I used to be, all over

again." She doesn't look at him, even as Bill gets dramatic about how it's all about him and because of their Total Love people and cats keep dropping like flies and people hate her even more than they used to. "You needing to be protected has nothing to do with you, or who you are. All of it is my fault." He strokes her hair, and she's still sad -- and pretty out of it -- even as he's asking her to let him carry some of the burden. To be the possum, in other words, and this is why Sookie is the greatest thing, because she gets it on a level nobody else seems to, and always says it right to your face with this immensely gracious bluntness, like she's just reminding you of something you already knew but were too polite to say:

"Bill. All the trouble I'm in? It's *mine*. I chose it. I chose it when I chose you. Don't you think I wanna blame somebody else? But what happened to my Gran -- and now to poor Tina -- it's *my* fault. And it's sweet of you to try to take it on for me, but if I let you? I'd be so mad at you I'd never be able to look at you again. And right now your face is just about the only thing getting me by. So why don't we just leave it on me, okay?" And Bill, for his stumbling sweet part, does get it: "Very well." He's sad, because how else can a man prove his love but by taking your burdens for his own, but he kisses her quietly. She says goodnight to him, firmly, and turns away again, in his arms. There are tears on her face, for the enormity of what she's just said. The choices she made, and keeps making every time she claims them. And when the memories start to come, Adele on the kitchen floor, on her shoulders and in her broken heart, she whimpers and pulls him closer. That's the best kind of love: not staring at each other, but facing forward together. Sometimes you just need everything to stop, and that's what he gives her: a partner, and the silence.

-- Page 11 --

Jason puts on the face of the killer again; it used to be the spell against his fear, and it still is. The killer, the vampire, the human, the monster. He didn't kill anybody yet. He has a vested interest in the infinite complexity and beauty of not being a monster, and puts on the face of a monster in order to hide his own face. He creeps up on her, innocent girl in the middle of nowhere, in a lovely flowered dress on a picnic blanket; he charges at her, screaming roughly in his killer voice. "You're a fucking dead woman!" Amy laughs and plays along -- "Oh my God!" -- as he jumps over her in the sunlight, and capers shirtless around her, giggling. "Honestly, you are like a little boy," she says indulgently, and pats the blanket. "Did I scare you? Yeah..." he says proudly. The games we play in the sun.

"Come here, lie down. I wanna show you something." He lies beside her, wriggling like a puppy, full of energy but obedient too. "What we looking at?" Oh, the trees. The beauty of the trees, all around them. "But we're not just looking, we're listening too." She shushes further questions, and you can hear it, the play and the sound of it: nature, all around, welcoming and ungrudging, loving you no matter what you do. "It's like the leaves are talking," he says wonderingly, and she smiles. "They're laughing." Jason's like a little boy: "Yeah, because they're ticklish!" Like making cloud pictures. "Wow," he murmurs, listening to the world. Amy?" Yeah, baby." We still high? "No, baby." This is you, stone-cold sober. Resting your sweet head on a bed of bones.

"I don't normally talk like this. Plus, I'm feeling kind of lightheaded too." Amy explains he's talking like a total stoner because his "mind" is starting to open up, but also he's lightheaded because, like any good junkie, he's stopped eating. She pops a raw almond in his mouth and his eyes light up, mouth hanging open as he savors every bit. "These're crazy good!" he says, and she starts in with that shit: "That's why we gotta change the way you eat. Raw foods. Nothing processed. Because the cleaner the body, the cleaner the soul, the

cleaner the experience." Last night was clean. The sun on the leaves of a forest that never ends. Sing the night that made you. He puts an almond in her mouth and kisses her, biting it in half. And back in the house, so afraid, hurting so badly he can't even sleep with the sun overhead, Eddie screams their names.

"He'll stop," she says. "He'll stop." Jason wonders -- because he's so busy hopping barrels he can't even hear what he's really thinking -- if somebody won't hear him, even as he goes on screaming. "We live in the middle of nowhere of the middle of nowhere," she scoffs, and he sits up, on the edge of a thought. "*He isn't a person*, Jason." Jason knows this is part of their world, now, this lie, so he spits at the idea that she should even have to tell him this basic, this obvious fact, and changes tactics: "My truck, for example. It ain't a person either. But I still fill it with gas and give it oil from time to time." Amy asks if they're supposed to feed him, then, offer up a vein and all the pain and fear that go with it, and he asks if Eddie won't die otherwise. "Who cares?" Jason doesn't have an answer for that, just another request for this nebulous "plan" he keeps asking for. All he ever wanted was somebody to tell him how to live, what to do, how to be a man. But once you let somebody do that for you, it's pretty much their job from that point on.

-- Page 12 --

Here's Amy's plan: "Everything's gonna work out. Because it has to." Jason immediately discerns the logical problem there, but she's not troubled overmuch. "Because when I am with you, what I feel... I've never felt that with anybody else ever before." And to assume she's lying, or playing him, is I think to miss a great deal of the point of Amy Burley. I don't think she's told a single lie, I just think she's inordinately good at keeping the contradictions an arm's length apart, and here's how: "I'm a person that... That a lot of bad stuff has happened to in the past." Like Jason, like you and me: "And so I deserve this."

"I love you." Only cartoons have cartoon characters. The rest of us manage to be terribly and wonderfully made, all the time. No matter how bad it's gotten, or how bad it's going to get, I'll say it again: Jason doesn't get better until he is capable of understanding and accepting this. That he's able to look at Jason and see Jason, and not all the pain between him and Jason. It's got a lot of horrible things attached to it, and a long ugly history we can only hope he'll have survived at the end of it, but he needs to hear this, here and now, even on the picnic of the damned, if he's going to survive at all. All of which is just large enough that he looks away, mumbling incoherently, and grabs the nearest beer. "Oh my God," Amy laughs. "Oh my God, I mean, why is it that we all need to be loved, but then when somebody finally says I love you, people just run scared? Hmm? *I love you*, Jason Stackhouse, whether you like it or not. I'm not afraid to admit it."

And in a perfect world, like losing your virginity or waking up in the morning, there are ways in which this moment in Jason's life could have gone better. It could have been before he started doing drugs, or before he got spun and started kidnapping; it could have happened without a man screaming in the background. But the world's not perfect: it's full of death and pain, because nature is all that we have. Anything that opens you is good, and nine times out of ten the things that change you the most come wrapped in hideous packages.

So when the sun comes out over his face and he drops his armor and has that grand realization, when he touches that grace we all search for and occasionally find, when he realizes that there's nothing to be afraid of and there never was, that's a good. That's a good, good thing. And it doesn't matter who he says it back to, because the doors that keep

us apart are always stronger than the bonds that tie us together. The person he says it to -- and I mean, this is huge -- is less important than the fact of him saying it. "Know what? You're right. Fuck it. I love you too." There is something softer, stronger, realer and more solid, behind his smile as he says it. Loving makes us more beautiful.

-- Page 13 --

And yes, this is blood magic and really horrible too, because on another level it's entirely important to whom he's saying it, because it's a spell that ties them together, bathed in the sun and with Eddie's screams playing across the field like a symphony, a threnody to the hell they are creating around themselves, so that when Eddie tries to warn Jason he won't hear him, because he is shielded in sunlight and valor and love and her salvation. But it's two different acts occurring at once. One of them he'll pay for, in blood; the other just brought him closer to the beauty he never even knew about, before the V. Both are real, neither are lies. Life is hard.

"Ten. Nine. Eight... Seven..." Lettie Mae busts in on her daughter in the bathroom, causing Tara to ask WTF if she was doing "something private." Sweetie, you were. You took your soul in your hands and put it on the scale. That's more private than sex, more private than God, and evil to interrupt. On the other hand, Tara's mom continues to be hilarious: "I taught you that was a sin against God. So if I walk in on you doing it, it's your problem, not mine!" That's so fucking fucked up, like, it's only a sin if I see you doing it, because otherwise God and I are going to be busy ))<>(( and I don't have time to worry about it. "What do you want?" Tara asks, exasperated and relieved and mostly grateful, and when Lettie Mae tells her Sam Merlotte's at the door, Tara breaks for it. "You ain't sleeping with him, are you?" Momma asks, and explains her thought process in more hilarious detail: "Because he brought flowers. Men only bring flowers if they already slept with you and looking to again. That especially goes for white men, as black men are less prone to grovel." I... cannot dispute the truth of any of that. And apparently Lettie Mae Thornton's experience exceeds my own, as I have only ever rarely had sex with my landlord in lieu of rent.

Tara stares at her crazy mother for a second and then stares at him through the screen door. Sam explains that he wants to apologize for "anything he said" that "hurt her feelings," which in this case is "you grunt like a farm animal when I'm fucking you, and by farm animal I kinda mean professional tennis player," which deserves flowers at the least, and he asks to sort things out. Lettie Mae's like, "Bullshit! He wants to fuck!" and Tara shoves him out into the yard, because the only thing worse than having that conversation with your mom is having it with the guy right there, and the only thing worse than that is when the guy in question is *toooooally dreamy Sam Merlotte*.

-- Page 14 --

Sam's like, WTF is she drinking again? More demons? And Tara almost laughs. "Nope. That's her, stone-cold sober. Look, you should go..." "How come? Why? "Because I'm just *too fucked up for this*." Right from the soles of her Payless shoes, that one. They both kind of lean back for a sec, like they're standing a safe distance from nuclear testing and the blast field just hit them. "I hate to break it to you? You're not even the most fucked up person in *this house*, much less this town." Not according to Miss Jeanette, but whatever: "What do you think this is between us anyway? Because we were clear from the beginning it was just gonna be us fucking." Sam calls adorable, obvious bullshit on that one, so she goes

on the offensive: "What are you, a masochist?" Is that what they call people who are actually wise and strong enough to love other people without waiting around for them to get perfect? Seems off somehow.

"I've spent my life running away from people, or pinning my hopes on somebody I can't have. I'm done with that. Like it or not, you've reminded me that I'm a social animal. I'd rather deal with your fucked up shit than be alone," Sam says. Which is right up there with Bill's whole psychic blood Tantra vibe, as far as how messily romantic that is. I mean, it's context dependent, because "I'd rather deal with your fucked up shit than be alone" is also like 99% of marriages and civil unions, and as you know most marriages end in murder because settling for something out of loneliness is slow death, but the implied and unexpressed "And yet I choose you even though I am an ICBM of pure sex aimed at planet Earth, because you rock when you're not being an asshole" makes all the difference. Tara, at wit's end in the face of all this awesomeness, fully goes, "Well, here's some fucked up shit for you to deal with. Do you know that right now as we speak, I have myself thinking I have a demon inside me? And the only way to get it out is have some crazy-ass lady who *lives in a bus out in the swamp* perform a \$800 exorcism on me? That there's no way in hell I can afford?" Girl makes a point.

Sam gives a good solid Wow to that one, and Tara's like, "See? Now I have proved I am unlovable! The only thing I ever wanted to be! Just like she said! There's a demon that's making me do this! Demons do not exist! Please kiss me! Stop me from treating you like shit! But if you try I will cut you! So now you are going crazy! Go away! Come here! I love you! I hate you! Mostly I might love you! Which makes me hate you!" Sam just kind of watches her melt down for awhile and finally he's like, "While it is true that that flavor of Tara is not my favorite, and you are bullshitting me right now instead of being honest, so now we're in a fight for no reason, I am willing to look past the imaginary demon because, again, you are awesome when you're not shitting yourself like a toddler. I mean, why is it that we all need to be loved, but then when somebody finally says they care, past every horrible gate you put in their way, you just keep running? I am capable of handling all the different sides of you that there are. *I'm a shapeshifter too, numbnuts.*" And faced with that, she literally runs, grunting athletically, back into her crazy fucking house. "See you at work!" he hollers, and throws the bouquet -- brilliantly -- on her lawn, where it will sit and accuse her silently for hours and hours and hours. He's almost *too* good at this.

-- Page 15 --

At Merlotte's later, Amy's all over Arlene about her ring, coming out into the restaurant, and asks about the engagement party. Arlene -- also way too good at this, but with a lot of practice at this point -- projects entirely in Sam's direction, "I don't know where we'd throw it, you know, our place isn't *BIG ENOUGH...*" Sam rolls his eyes and offers Merlotte's, and she's all about how she doesn't want to impose, of course, so he assures her she's not, of course. "It'd be like any night, except I'd close the place to the public for you and your nearest and dearest." She gushes for a second before offering her suggestions further to this deal: "That would be amazing... Except I was thinking, could we maybe do it in the warehouse next door? Or even outside? 'Cause if we did it in here, it'd feel like work, you know..." and Sam's highly amused.

"You were thinking, huh? About the party I only just now offered to throw for you?" She laughs sort of hysterically, called out, and he laughs back. It's nice. "You are a spectacular man, Sam Merlotte!" He reveals his secret knowledge that she's one hell of a conniving

suck-up when she needs to be, and she gawks at him, laughing like OMG she can't believe he said that. He gives her catering and the band, but the booze and incidentals are on her and Rene. "Got it. And I may be conniving, but I still mean it: You are gonna make some woman extremely happy one day." Still bruised, Sam wishes aloud that some woman would actually let him do that like one time, and when he cordially wishes the entering Sookie a good morning, she tells him there is not a fucking good thing about this fucking morning, storming to the back of the restaurant. Some fucking motherfucker killed her fucking grandmother and her fucking cat and she is in No Mood, no matter how bouncy her hair is.

On the road crew, Jason sits around with his noisemuffs on, loving the trees and listening to them, but not like with his ears but with his heart, and the idiot smile on his face that attends this behavior. Lafayette spits out his burger, bitching about the "Secret Sauce" which is in actuality mayonnaise, and Hoyt sweetly protests that he likes it regardless, but Lafayette is not having it. It's mayonnaise, and that's no secret at all, even if it tastes good. Jason grins at Rene and asks what he's up to, and Rene says he's going to take care of some fucking roots that have the wrong idea and are growing up through the sidewalk. He gets the jackhammer ready, and starts to drill, and Jason freaks out and tackles him, because God forbid Rene do his job. Rene immediately freaks out, because that was a dangerously pointless, stupid stunt, and tries to throttle Jason until Lafayette peels him off and away.

-- Page 16 --

"This ain't just some root growing up out of nowhere, it's connected to that tree! Everything we see, man, it's all... It's all connected!" When you bring back the good stuff from heaven or faerie, and try to show it to people, it ends up leaves and dirt and shit, which is why you keep it together and you keep it to yourself and remember the real world, too. The thing about bouncing back and forth between worlds, before you get adept at treading them both, is that you look like an asshole either way. To save that tree is to endanger Rene Lanier; you can't even hear Eddie screaming over the chuckles of the ticklish leaves. When people bitch about religion, that's what they're bitching about, because that's all addiction is, too. Lafayette hustles Rene away, who's still screaming at him with terror turned to rage: "I'm about to get married! There are people that count on me!" He looks like he could kill him, and I can't think of a good reason he shouldn't; Lafayette takes him away to take care of him, and Hoyt reaches out to Jason. Which is a bad idea only because he just got snapped back to the real world with a quick and ugly rip -- out of heaven, down into reality -- when he thought he was already there.

"Hey. Is everything all right, Jay?" Jason's anger is instant; he stares down at Hoyt's sweet hand on his shoulder and shrugs it off. "Tell me, Hoyt? Were you on the football team?" Hoyt hears the danger in his voice, but not the why, because the why doesn't matter. Jason grabs him roughly, even as he realizes he's fucking this up too, but too full of energy and fear and confusion, too full of salvation, to focus: "Were you on the football team?" he asks again, and pushes Hoyt down, in the dirt. Hoyt Fortenberry, who outweighs him by thirty pounds and six inches; Hoyt Fortenberry whom he knows would never hurt him, never raise a hand to protect himself. "Then you do not call me Jay. You got that?"

The only person better at being a man, meaning fucking, were the vampires he watched fucking Maudette, the vampires he imagined fucking Dawn. And then they were the vampires he imagined fucking, no matter how much it terrified him; the vampires he pretended to be, fucking Maudette and then Dawn, killing Maudette and Dawn and Amy. He's just like a little boy, trying on these costumes and taking them off again. And yesterday

he brought the whole thing full circle: he fucked Amy in front of a vampire. A fat faggot one. See now? See who the man is now?

-- Page 17 --

Men don't fear, don't cry, don't hear the laughter of the leaves; you can't bring that part of Amy World back to the road crew, because the world turns on you, so there you go in the other direction, reminding sweet Hoyt who the real man, the Varsity man, is here. ("You're not the first vain-ass, body-conscious ex-jock to overdo the V," she said.) The second something opens you up, the second you say those words you never say, the real world turns on you; reminds you of what men do and are and say. Rene who's getting married like a grownup, Rene on whom women and children depend; Lafayette who looks at you like a child and tells you when you can have your medicine. And sweet gigantic Hoyt Fortenberry: too caring, too soft, too willing to apologize for the roughness of the world. Disgusting, weak Hoyt, who would never understand that it's not *being* protected and loved, but *needing* to be protected and loved that's the issue, that wanting to be protected makes him feel as helpless as he used to be, before he became a man. It's kind of you to try to take it on for him, but if he lets you, for even a second, he'd be so mad at you he'd never be able to look at you again. Hoyt shoves him off, as gently as he can, and stands up, disgusted. They wander away from each other, and Hoyt, whose feelings are still hurt, looks at the ground at Jason's feet, and apologizes for whatever it was, just like with Tara last week. Hoyt doesn't even need to know what he did, he just needs to make it okay. "I'm... Yeah, I'm sorry." And Jason slides down that tree, to the ground, and it's just a tree again. And he's just a man.

Sookie absentmindedly adjust the gigantic chip on her shoulder and asks Andy Bellefleur what the fuck he wants for lunch even though she already fucking knows, and he asks to see Sam, and she says she'll tell him Andy's looking for him but meanwhile what the fuck does Andy want for lunch and by the effing way, "While you make up your mind, how about I tell you what you can get for me, Andy Bellefleur? I'd love to have whoever's killing off my family's head on a platter. Think you could arrange that for me?" Andy sort of officially asks her to stop being a bitch, but she kind of has a point: "I don't appreciate my officers of the law enjoying casual lunches while there's a killer out there trying to hunt me down." Across the room, Amy's Spidey Sense causes her to excuse herself and come toward them. "Did you know he got into my house again last night? Yes. And he killed my cat. He *cut her head off and took it with him*." When you put it like that, it's not only awful but hilarious. It's like the more pissed off Sookie becomes, the more adorable she can't help but get, like some kind of evolutionary leg up.

-- Page 18 --

Andy is, of course, horrified, and asks why she didn't call the police. Valid! "Because all the station would've done is send you. And I can guarantee you if I had called, you'd still be here right now acting like you don't know what you're gonna order, even though you always have the cheeseburger." That's called *tmesis*, when you put a word inside another word like that; it's like a little mushroom guy you have to jump over to get to the end of the word. Amy doesn't waste any time screwing around, just offers to take "Detective," note, Bellefleur's order. Sookie screeches that it's her table, like a five-year-old, and Amy's like, "Dude? Chill. Take a break." Sookie pounds a fist against the table and runs off, wondering why people are always saying she's a crazy retard because that's so unfair, and Andy's like, "And I will have the fucking cheeseburger and fries because that bitch is psychic," and

Amy's eyebrows are all, "And yet the only thing worse than rural Louisiana is somehow still Connecticut."

Later, Amy finds Sookie grumbling in the gazebo and Sookie subtly implies she should go fuck herself. "Sometimes I wish I smoked, you know? So you could sneak outside without anybody knowing something's wrong with you." Amy's like, Um, okay. "I'm really sorry about your cat," she says, just at the right moment as she's leaving, and Sookie's like, "I am so Tara right now! I shouldn't have come in." Amy asks why the hell she did, considering all the things that have of late befallen her, and Sookie goes, "I dunno, because if I called in sick every time somebody I loved got murdered I'd never come to work?" Amy smiles, and says Sam would understand, but Sookie's like, not the point. Arlene's more useless than usual, showing off her ring the whole time, and Tara's off being nuts, so it's really just Sookie being an asshole and Amy being perfect, which is unfair to everybody. Amy's all about how Arlene is kind of a wonderful fucking pain in your ass, and Sookie laughs. "Can you imagine what she was like the first time she got married?"

"What about you? You ever been married?" Amy asks, in her irritating hipster pseudoironic too-cool fashion if "this" is "the part where the sister asks what the girl's intentions are with her brother," and instead of saying "No! This is the part where the sister punches your irritating ass in the eye," Sookie's like, "FYI and to review, my brother is a sister-slapping fuckwad candlestick-stealing drug addict and I hate him, as we discussed the other day. Frankly I hope this is the part where your intentions are to eat his liver with a nice Chianti."

-- Page 19 --

Amy's like, "Kinda. On a separate note, he feels sort of bad about punching you in the face that one time, after he invited your molester to a family event. In the brief interludes between our kidnappings and the drugged-up live sex shows we put on in front of our torture and eventual serial murder victims -- and of course when he's not trying to kill Rene and Hoyt, his only living friends besides the drug dealer he's managed to completely alienate -- he feels bad for likeentire seconds at a time. Also, he's convinced that he killed your parents, which is stressing him out, and he does eat a lot of processed sugars, and you know how that goes, but generally: when it occurs to him? Total *mea culpa*."

Sookie's amazed that Jason even told her about the punching in the face, and really wants to believe Amy when she says he's "a mess about it," referring to the proof of how he actually doesn't even have time to care due to his new hobby of combining the less attractive portions of *Gummo* and *Trainspotting* into what he's convinced is a workable lifestyle. And then Amy does that thing where she tells the truth again, so impossibly honestly and clear-eyed that you can't help but follow her there: "Look, I know what you must think of him. And I get why you're mad at him, I do. But he loves you. You've still got people around you who love you." Just, you know, less. And no cat. "And all I can hope is that maybe one day, I can be counted in among those people." Too far! But Sookie is, I may have mentioned, having a time of it lately, so she's enchanted. "You are way too good for him. You know that, right?" Amy's like, "Whatever keeps you thinking we're good enough friends that you don't read my spooky, crazy, fucked-up mind."

Jason speeds up to the house in his truck and jumps out and runs inside all pissy and troubled, as we all would be after a long day of cognitive dissonance on this level, and on the TV Nan Flanagan, Terrifying Vampire Lady, is once again fighting it out with some overprocessed whiteboy Jesus freak, and Jason's grabbing at beer and empty pizza boxes,

and eventually Eddie's screams make it through the static and the noise, and no matter how many times Jason screams at him to shut up, he can't. "After the massacre of three of our kind in Louisiana earlier this week," Nan says, "I think the world should take notice of the fact that we have not retaliated." Jason holds his hands an inch or two off the chair's arms, breathing slowly and softly, trying to get it back. Just a taste, just a bit of that feeling, that calm rightness. Here, now, where nobody can see him. "...And we will not. Which leaves us with the question of exactly who is hunting whom out there in America tonight?" The screaming bursts through again, into his head, like a stake through the heart. He balls his fists, screaming all the way, and comes downstairs.

-- Page 20 --

Eddie thanks him piteously, terribly, for coming downstairs, and begs snarling Jason to move him; there's too much pain, the chair's digging into him and he's too weak to move himself. "Thought y'all couldn't feel pain," Jason says, honestly, and Eddie... Oh, Eddie's looking bad. Sweaty and hellish. "When you don't drink, your body... Your whole body aches more than anything I ever felt when I was alive. Please?" Jason puts his beer down on the washer, making Eddie promise to shut up, that it's not a trick, that he won't bite him. "I don't even have the energy. Just, please?" Jason crudely slaps his head out of the way and anchors his hands around Eddie as he moans, quietly. Calls him a "doughy fuck" and Eddie apologizes, then screams as Jason moves him higher on the chair. "That any better?" Eddie can barely tell. Jason bends over, back wrenched from the effort, and cracks his back. "Good. Because now I'm all fucked up." Jason, you see, is capable of discomfort.

Getting ready for work, Tara finds an envelope of cash in her cubby in Sam's office, and quickly runs out to the bar to ask him WTF it's doing there. He slices his night's limes quietly and tells her to drop it, they'll talk about it after work. And then it's him that runs, back to his office, to hide from it all, and Tara -- bewildered by all of this, because honestly -- takes over lime-slicing duty.

Bill delights in the sunlight, pulling his golf club back and smacking the ball hard, for a hole in one. He's playing Wii, all alone with a projection screen, when the doorbell rings. Clamping down his joy and turning it off, he heads to the window by the door. His head hangs low a moment before he answers. Eric is huge, staring down at him from the door, with Pam and somebody else that looks like Otho from *Beetlejuice*. That's Chow, Long Shadow's replacement. Bill goes, "Oh." Then they all stand around totally awkwardly for awhile before Bill's like, "Incidentally, the horrible thing that happens because I killed that douche, that's still happening? You couldn't find a workaround by any chance?" Eric's all, "I didn't even try."

And Pam -- here's what she's wearing by the way, an adorable trenchcoat and sunglasses on her head, which are like the only thing a vampire absolutely will never ever need, because it's Halloween every day because she is the very greatest of all vampires -- giggles, just completely tickled by Eric as always. Bill asks her how she likes it up Eric's ass, and she's like, "It is so awesome up Eric's ass! In fact, I say give it a shot. Ya douchebag!" Bill's like, "Well, now that Malcolm's dead I'll consider it, but not until Sookie dumps me for being a paternalistic creep. Meantime, can we go visit her before the horrible thing that's going to happen?" Pam's like, "Awesome, we can check out the total tragedy that is Merlotte's Bar & Grill," and Eric totally goes, "Yes indeedy!" Chow asks what Wii game Bill was playing, as though you can't tell just by looking at him, and says his best score at Imaginary Pebble Beach is eleven imaginary strokes under imaginary par, which is four better than Bill, so

Bill's all, "I liked Long Shadow better." But I'll tell you this much: much like almost anything or anyone I've ever personally seen, Otho's easier on the eyes than Long Shadow to such a degree that he's kinda hot.

-- Page 21 --

And now Jason's doing crunches on the mattress to stretch out his back, while Eddie watches. This kid, I tell ya. He says the back cramp went away right away -- "Guess that's a perk of me doing V!" -- but continues doing it because it feels good. It's not like he's got much else to do, I guess, but more than anything I think it's just those two things feeling good. Stretching his body, and being with Eddie: stretching. "What's with the weight, dude?" he asks, lying back. "I thought all you vampires were supposed to be in shape." Eddie shakes his head and says we're only what we ever were before: he led a sedentary life. Jason asks, blameless and curious, what "sedentary" means, and Eddie explains: "Desk job. I was an accountant." Jason backflips to a standing position, like a drug-addicted ninja. "Sat around a lot, ate a lot of junk food." Jason heads over to grab a beer, kicking Eddie's foot, friendly: "Well, how's someone go from being an accountant to being a vampire?" It wasn't the straightest line. It never is. We spend half our lives going to a place and the rest trying to figure out how we got there. The lucky ones can. "I always had this sense that it wasn't really *my* life I was leading. But I convinced myself it was the life I wanted." A year ago, when he was human, Eddie came home to find his wife, "crying like her whole family had just died." It had. She'd spent half her life going somewhere.

Some kid, not unlike Jason, now or in his youth, had suggested possibly, in the middle of a common fistfight, that his dad was a fucking faggot. Jason nods; it happens. "Well? Kids are morons." Which is all she wanted to hear, and instead her whole family was dying all around her. "What, she never even had a clue?" Eddie almost smiles, painfully: "How could she, when even I didn't?" Jason gets that, too: the multitude of places we don't admit we're going, the number of men inside us, waiting to come out. He apologizes to Eddie for the divorce, because he knows: at that moment it wasn't just her family dying, it was his too. Eddie was a Brontosaurus. Eddie was Pluto, cut and spinning out of orbit. Homeless.

"Comes a point in life when you realize everything you know about yourself, it's all just conditioning. It's the rare man who truly knows who he is. At least I accomplished that." Jason gets exactly half of that; he'll get the whole thing but he'll bleed for it first. "I guess it helps that you don't look all that gay," he says brightly, like it's a compliment, like it's the thing men tell each other, and themselves; he hops onto the washer, kicking his feet. He's like a little boy. Eddie considers him, amused. "Most of the gays I come across, they look like..." Eddie grins: "You. You're what we're supposed to look like." Jason smiles, he knows it's true.

-- Page 22 --

I think where the conversation, about sexual difference, falls apart in its own terms. "Homophobia" doesn't mean fear of sameness anymore than hydrophobia means fear of water. It's a varying mixture of degrees of fear and hate, and the second we start conflating those two emotions we've lost the entire plot. Jason's got neither fear nor hate: he knows at least one thing about himself, and has what I think is a healthy disinterest, for a heterosexual kid, in hot boy-on-boy action, but it's never interfered with his relationship with Lafayette, or Eddie, or the commercialization of his own body. I don't think it signifies, because that's not how Jason defines himself: he's not, like so many guys we can think of,

predicated on being not-gay. His fangophobia, such as it is, started from the same place as the fear implicit in homophobia, which is more to do with a physical paranoia of being invaded. Also healthy. I mean, even in his fantasies that scared him so badly, he was the one fucking Liam. Not the other way around. I mean, he's completely neurotic about his sexual identity, but not about what we usually mean when we use that phrase. His sexual identity is fluid, but not in the way we usually mean. His masculinity is predicated on a lot of things that have nothing to do with sex, and a lot of things that have to do with specifically straight sex, but the gay thing just doesn't seem to be an issue. Which is why this comment, a compliment from where he's standing, makes him giggle like a kid. Because he knows it's true.

"Anyway, after she left me and took my kid, I went to a gay bar, hit on a couple of men. Got laughed at, or pitied. Then I saw this one guy. He was even less of a looker than me, and he had beautiful young men all over him. Somebody told me he was a vampire. I guess I just thought: Well, that's for me. After that, it was just a matter of time before I found someone willing to turn me." Jason smiles, getting it: "That's crazy!" Told you it wasn't the straightest of lines; told you it never was. Jason nods and takes a drink: "So, uh, how did it work out for you? With the guys, and everything?" Were you saved, in your salvation? Did it get you out of the house, did it bring you pleasure? Or did you retreat to the cave, paying for prostitutes with your blood, and eventually get you kidnapped and tortured and murdered by the sweetest little boy in Renard Parish? "Well," Eddie says, glancing down at his bound body: "You tell me." Jason's sad for him, finding himself in another predicament, but it doesn't occur to him yet to feel guilty. Somebody else is driving.

-- Page 23 --

But oh, Eddie. Because you went further than people are supposed to go, in order to make your dreams come true. And in the end, you settled for a life like we all do, made up of equal parts frustration and least effort. It was the line of best fit, and it led straight here. Sick of trying, you decided not to try at all, and let them come to you. Only to find yourself in the same exact place: trapped, tied up, preyed on by beautiful boys. Forever.

*Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment/ Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie.*

Sookie's taking an order so she doesn't see Bill come in with the rest of them, but Tara and Amy go scared and still. "Bill? What's going on?" Everybody watches her, because she's in charge when this happens. She's the ambassador, as well as the scapegoat. We respect our possums even when we're destroying them, because they do the work we can't. "Wow," Eric breathes, "His place is even more depressing than I thought it'd be." Bill puts off Sookie's questions and asks for Sam, bewilderingly, and Tara, shivering, tells him Sam's in his office. Hoping all four of them will bounce. "Try to behave yourself," Bill hisses at Eric, who grins winsomely. "Don't I always?" He is *sixteen feet tall*, once he stands up off that throne.

Bill knocks and politely asks Sam for a moment; he thinks and lets him in. Chow follows, making it clear that's not up for discussion. "I have very little time, so I'll be brief. I've been called away and I need you to watch over Sookie, protect her while I'm gone." Sam's like, I am being Punk'd. "Don't expect her to be too keen on the idea. Sookie hates feeling like she doesn't have her independence." Sam asks him to stop telling him how Sookie is and what she's like, and Bill gets closer, because he knows how much it bugs him: "I also know how you feel about her, and I don't like it. But I'm asking you because you're the only one I can

ask." Sam's eyebrows beg him not to go on. "You're the only person I know of who can protect her in my absence." Sam looks at the floor: no masks now. They are men, alone together, in the shadows, and what he's asking is bigger than love triangles or anything else; it's an acknowledgement of the shadows. "Of course I will. But I'll be doing it for her, not for you." He circles Bill and goes back to work on the books; Bill thanks the place where he was standing.

"So simply present this card at the door when you get to Fangtasia, and the first round is on me," Eric says, handing out invites. "Also, Thursdays are Ladies Nights, so be sure to bring a date" says Pam. "That is, if you can get one." The guys all laugh, charmed by her, but as she's handing a card to one of Royce's boys, Eric cuts her off. "-- Not him. He doesn't get one." The guy's all, "What gives, bro?" And Eric zooms into his face as the place goes quiet. His arm is burnt with napalm, bandaged, on the table. "What'd you do to your arm there, *Bro?* Hmm?" The guy hides his arm as Bill returns, and Eric calls out without looking, "I take it your business here is done?" The business, but not the goodbye. Eric gives him three minutes to talk to Sookie: "We have a Tribunal to get to." Bill takes her outside, and Eric addresses the crowd. "Before I go, a word of advice: We know when a human has wronged us. We can smell it." Amy shivers, singing *lalala*. "So do not make the mistake of letting the pretty blond vampire lady on television make you feel too comfortable. We may not have retaliated, yet..." Everyone stares, the burnt man shudders. "...But we know who you are. Have a nice night."

-- Page 24 --

Bill stand with her, in his leather jacket, explaining about Long Shadow, and consequences. "If one of you killed another one of you defending one of us, you don't think there would be a trial?" Sookie puts on her resolved face and says she wants to come along as usual, that she'll testify, whatever it takes, and his voice is sharp with fear: "Damn it, Sookie, you can't. You can't come, and you can't testify. You will not be welcome there." Sookie realizes he was lying, when he said it was okay; Sookie begs him with her eyes to repeat the lie. "I honestly don't know," he says, and behind him Eric softly says, "Tick-tock, Bill." He tells her to watch her ass, and that he's put Sam on guard detail; she's funny: "I wish you hadn't done that..." He tells her to be smart and let him, reminding her there is still a killer on the loose. His eyes are wet, and scared. He's thought about this. She says she will, takes it to heart, and he thanks her. "...And time," Eric calls, and they kiss. Passionate and afraid and in front of everybody. Tara finally gets it; Pam says mordantly, "If I had any feelings, I'd have the chills right about now." Eric almost laughs: "Not me!" There are tears on her face, as they're kissing, and Eric barks his name, once. Bill jerks, and longs to lean in, to kiss her again, to never stop kissing. "Now." Bill touches her face, and her hands, and goes with them; she stares after, tears running down her face, and heads back toward the bar.

"You all right?" Tara asks, concerned and scared, amazed at the sudden depth of feeling she'd not witnessed before. Sookie shakes her head. Tara starts to apologize for the fight Sookie engineered crazily on her last week, and Sookie chokes back tears: "-- Tara, right now I don't even remember what it is I'm supposed to be mad at you for, so why don't we both just forget it, okay?" They embrace. And normally I would call bullshit on that kind of thing, but in this case the fight was completely stupid and made up because Sookie was going insane with grief, and Tara may be possessed by a demon, so yeah: best to just move on.

"It was in the flood," Jason says. Amy is opening him up, door after door after door, walking down the halls of him and unlocking doors and begging him to come out. There's no evil in that. Eddie gasps in sympathy. "Yep, it was the shits. But you gotta play the hand you're dealt, I guess." Eddie worries, because that means that Jason was left without a father or even a grandfather, just Adele and Sookie; just adrift in a world of women. "It's just that a boy needs a man in his life, to teach him what it means to be a man." Jason's defensive, thrown by that, because he always thought he did a good job with that, and he's certainly not going to take manhood advice from a subhuman homosexual on how to get it right. He breaks contact and grabs another beer.

-- Page 25 --

"That's the hardest part of all this for me. My boy. He's got nothing but women around him now. He needs me, I'm not there." Jason assures him the son will be all right: "I mean, look at me, huh?" Eddie does; he looks at Jason, trying to make him feel better, and realizes just how in over his head this kid is. He really doesn't see the connection from this, this love and respect they are learning for each other, and the deadly, awful, painful situation Jason's put him in. Just honestly has managed to split those two things apart. He feels a deep sadness, and Jason feels it, looking back, and something unlocks inside him; there is a powerful connection forged, something that can't be taken back. Something that says Jason, through all this, is good, and wise, and better than his circumstances. And oh my God, do people hate it when you start that shit.

"*Don't you try to glimmer me*, Amy warned me about that." Eddie shakes his head, because that's not what's going on at all. Or that's all it ever is: looking deeply enough into somebody else's eyes that you can see their good parts and their bad parts, and love the gold between them, no matter how bad it gets. "I'm too depleted to glamour you. That's something I haven't quite mastered yet, anyway..." Jason's surprised, like becoming a vampire doesn't come with instructions and a toy kit. Like being an adult, or becoming a man. "Learning to be a vampire doesn't happen overnight any more than learning to be a man does." Jason looks away, accepting that, and Eddie pushes a little bit: "You gonna marry her?" You gonna be the kind of man who matters, who other people depend on? The kind of man who deserves to be saved, because he has a family?

"I don't know. We haven't been together that long. But..." He grins, with a shared secret. "Just between you and me? I could really see her being the one." Eddie shakes his head, determined to play this out, to keep talking no matter how bad it gets or how many shapes Jason assumes, to play through. Because if he saves Jason, he won't die either. "Don't do it. Don't marry her." Jason screams and bitches, and Eddie just closes his eyes and keeps going. "She's a psychopath. She is. She is far more dangerous than I could ever be." (Which is exactly what she needs to be, to fix Jason. I wasn't recapping *Weeds* back then, but Amy Burley is U-Turn. That's literally all she is. And not to seem stereotypy, but that coincidentally makes Lafayette the Heylia, which tracks even better. Amy's going to save him by destroying him, watch.) Jason, cornered and caged, kicks out at Eddie and runs away, for more beer. Eddie stares up at him, watching as Jason turns him back into an animal, behind his eyes. "While I'm gone, keep your fucking howling to a minimum." So the eightball says try again later, I guess.

-- Page 26 --

Tara shoves the money against Sam's chest, and he ushers her into the office to actually discuss it. "You can't tell me I'm keeping it!" she shouts, and throws it down on the desk; they agree that they are a pair of stubborn sons of bitches. "You ... really believe you have a demon in you?" Tara begins to cry, looking down. Is it really a demon? Does it matter? How many times, do you think, has she tried the mirror trick since we saw her last? What do you think happened? "I think I got something inside me that is... scared. And pissed off, and mean..." He nods, and they say it together: "And fucked up." She's got something in her, like a beast or an animal, that makes funny sounds in bed, and gets scared in a way that doesn't brook words, and angry in a way that makes no time for thinking, and gets mean when it's hungry, or when it gets denied. Most of all, I mean to say, the thing inside Tara gets howling rabid mad, chainlink barking mad, postman-biting mad when its territory is threatened. And that's like all of us too, but more like Sam than most.

"Look, two years ago nobody even knew there was such a thing as vampires. Now we gotta deal with them every goddamn day. And who knows what else is out there?" And could you handle it? Could you love it, if there were? If somebody told you a magical world, full of creatures of legend, full of sex and darkness and power and light, existed just outside the margins of what we're all trying desperately to make into the semblance of a real life, an adult life, what would you do with that information? He doesn't know about Sookie kissing Bill, or what it looked like, the sun and the moon together in the sky, and how Tara understood in that moment. He thinks he's advocating for the existence of demons, and secretly he's advocating for the existence of love in a world of shapeshifters and monsters and so much fear, so many ways to get hurt. And the real secret is, she's already there. She's showing him her demon, the thing inside her, first. This is the exorcism. Here, now.

"Eight hundred bucks? That's... That's a lot of money, Sam," she says, ashamed by the amount. "Yeah, well? People in this town drink a lot. I'm doing okay." Tara finally looks at him, the walls breaking down into stones, and then to tears, and he kisses her before she can thank him. This is the exorcism.

"Interesting night," Lafayette says, and Sookie, full of fear and grief, hisses that it's all too interesting. "Shit, ain't no such a thing as too interesting, only too dull." And as she stomps off: "So John, how big is your dick?" Heh. And that's when she sees them, kissing: Sam, her dog in shining armor, kissing Tara, her best and only friend. The boy who will always love her and catch her when she falls, because he's loyal as a beast; the girl who says the things she can't say, and loves her more than anything. The two people in the world who let her into their minds, and souls, without question. And this is the first secret. Think about that for a second: not just these two, not just her best friend secretly seeing her boss, her friend, the boy she keeps on the line, the boy she still seethes at for never getting in line until it was too late, when Bill Compton came to Bon Temps. None of that matters as much as this: it's the very first lie anyone ever told Sookie Stackhouse.

-- Page 27 --

Heartbreaking. She's grossed out and pissed off and runs back through the kitchen, assuring Lafayette that there is such a motherfucking thing as "too interesting" after all, harshly. And Bill, off doing God knows what because of her, dying for her like everyone she loves, one by one by one. She tells Amy to cover her tables and runs off to Bill's, even as Amy's trying to keep her there and safe. Running out to the car, suddenly unprotected, unsafe, betrayed by the man who was supposed to keep her safe and then betrayed by his deputy; the night is suddenly very cold. We surround ourselves with people that make us

feel like it's possible to keep living; they protect us with their presence. And sometimes, they go away. She gets into her car as quickly as possible, with the million songs of night around her, and shivers as the engine won't turn over. There are shadows in the back seat. And then she's gone, driving to Bill's.

Sam comes out of the backroom buckling his belt, hilariously, and makes awkward conversation with Amy Burley about how well her employment is going, on both sides. She tells him the others are gone, and Sam gets nervous and shaky, trying to find out where Sookie's gone. He heads out at full tilt, screaming profanities, and nearly knocks over Andy Bellefleur, with a gun on his belt. "Hey there, Sam. Turns out that little story you told me the other day about growing up in a nudist colony didn't exactly check out. We need to talk." Sam knows he's right, but ducks out anyway, because he cannot let her down again. He runs inside, citing something forgotten inside, and a few minutes later there's a pile of clothes somewhere in the bar, and that collie comes running past. He ignores Andy's kind hello, and Andy kicks the ground. "Well, screw you too," he mutters, and keeps waiting.

Sookie drives as fast as a run from the devil, checking her backseat every few seconds, all the shadows accumulated; every nightmare true at once, holding itself at bay until she drops her defenses. There's a fear in her, something scared and pissed off and fucked up. She pulls up to Bill's, as close as possible to the door, and makes a run for it. At a rustle she jerks up short, turning in terror: it's that dog. The only male that never let her down. She kisses him in delight, and he whines, worried for her, begging to go inside. "Tell you what, why don't you come spend the night with me and I'll take you back to Merlotte's tomorrow, okay?" She kisses him again, and he barks in agreement. The nightmares follow her movements through the windows as she skips up the step, grateful that she's no longer alone.

-- Page 28 --

As she's chatting him up in the bedroom, naming him "Dean," she takes off her bra under her shirt. But when she drops her skirt, he turns his head as though he's suddenly been struck shy. "Look at you, looking away! What a gentleman." He doesn't move, so she keeps talking, weirded out. "Here, would it make you more comfortable if I got under the covers?" Dean doesn't reply, so she crawls under the covers in her t-shirt and panties, laughing at him. "You can't sleep on the floor all night, you're gonna catch a draft!" She shakes out hair luxuriously, stretches against the cold sheets; she commands him to join her and he does. Sweet dreams, sweet Dean. He stretches across the foot of the bed, between her and the nightmares, and she turns off the lamp, surprised by the comfort she's suddenly found in him. In the morning she'll wake, irritated, with his weight upon her feet. She'll wiggle until he wakes, laughing to herself in the sunlight, and she'll sit up, looking down at him. And it won't be Dean the dog, lying across the bed, but Sam, naked as a jaybird, and then they'll scream. But she'll have been kept safe, all through the night.

Children, babies, they're on *V* all the time: they know that they are part of nature, and nature's all they have. Every caress and sweet sound, every sip of milk, comes from God. The warmth of the sun, the colors of the furniture and the blankets and the toys, it's all coming to them from who knows where; it is suffused with delight. The problem is that babies tend to shit themselves, and get pissed off when their needs aren't immediately met. In order for them to learn to live in the unending chaos and screaming bleeding colors of the world, we must tell them a very simple lie.

The first lie we're taught is that we are alone. That the sparks between you and me that we only see on V are false images; that we must work forever to forge those connections to anyone if we're going to survive. We forget that it's a lie. We're taught that we are like the Brontosaurus, or Pluto: on our own stable, lonely orbits; that to reconnect to even one other person is such a luxury and such an opportunity that we must bleed for it. That self-hatred is the straightest line to self-improvement, because the world is full of nightmares and hell is other people. The only thing V tells us is that this is a lie. It's the first lie, the thing that makes all other lies possible. We spend the rest of our lives in Pluto's orbit, in the land of the dead, watching our [Heroes](#) and screaming like infants for someone to love us, so that we can love ourselves. Telling ourselves that because Lafayette or Jason don't love us in precisely the way that we want them to, that their love is worthless. That the beautiful aren't capable or worthy of compassion. That's the first lie: that we're alone, that we deserve to be alone. That we must defend our territory, when giving it up willingly only increases territory for everyone.

-- Page 29 --

But redemption is a process of remembering: specifically that we're not alone and we never have been. Because if everything is connected, as the infants and the V-juicers know, then our duty is very simple: to keep those connections alive, to keep *each other* alive, to keep ourselves surrounded in the beauty and the purity and the love of everybody else. To assure that everybody gets out alive, through acts of kindness both simplistic and extreme. To pay for each other's exorcisms; to accept help when it's offered. To remember above all else that the same sparks and the same blood run through us all: that that True Blood is all we have.

Tonight, Jason comes home, popping the clutch and pulling up to his house in a cloud of dust. The sun's still down, he's still an addict; he's still the jailer to a creature of God, who in a short year has seen and retreated from mysteries and wonders Jason's still never seen. But Eddie is dying, and Jason knows there's more to life than that. There has to be. Everything else is a lie. (I keep saying he's Starbuck, but considering the direct correlation between Horrible Acts Performed and Intensity of Love I apparently Feel for Him, he's starting to resemble Gaius Baltar.) So Jason props up his friend, still bound in silver, and puts a straw into his mouth, and shouts at him to wake up, to drink. To live, for the first time. And as Eddie drinks, Jason pats his shoulder without looking. Eddie looks up at him: Jason is a shapeshifter. He's never met this Jason before: Breakfast?

The exorcism begins.

## THE PIG IT WAS THAT LIVED

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 10 | Aired on 11.09.2008

*I Don't Wanna Know* - Everybody goes insane simultaneously, and only your friendly neighborhood were-collie is available to help pick up the pieces. Suffice to say the pieces mostly remain unpicked-up. And in other news, Bill gives birth.

Immediately upon waking up with naked Sam in her bed and learning that he is a shapeshifter -- not a werewolf, he's intense about pointing out -- Sookie decides to spend the entire episode waiting to die, feeling abandoned by everyone, and being a giant bitch. As usual, she has more than enough excuses to do so. She feels betrayed by Sam, both romantically and now ontologically, and what with Bill having run off for the nineteenth episode running to go play reindeer games with his vamp friends, she's in no mood. Arlene's engagement party -- a classically understated affair to be sure -- also provides the Killer with a pretext to stalk Sookie around Merlotte's and drive her right back into Sam's arms.

Eddie the Fang and Amy the Loon play a quick game of Cat and Mouse for Jason's soul, which Amy awesomely turns into some kind of fucked up European backpacking adventure where Eddie's their pet vamp, until a masculinity pep talk from Rene Lanier -- and a roughing-up from a very worried Lafayette -- cause Jason to assert himself by letting Eddie go. Amy goes sort of insane and stakes Eddie, causing massive heartbreak on Jason's part and a certain gooiness for Eddie.

Bill watches some guy get his fangs pulled out by the Tribunal, but when it's his turn for judgment, he manages to mouth off just enough that the Magister changes his sentence. Instead of being locked in a coffin for five years -- which is apparently just long enough to wither away to "leather and sticks" and go completely insane -- he's forced to sire a young sheltered Christian girl. Just when you think it's going to be really bad, you remember that you forgot glamouring, and that it's going to be okay... But then the Magister tells him to cut it out, which means the eventual ritual -- which, with everybody around, manages to encapsulate the worst parts of birth, murder, and sexual assault -- is even worse than you originally thought.

Tara spends the dawn doing intense ritual and personal demonology with Miss Jeanette, the morning with Lettie Mae sucking the heads of celebratory post-exorcism crawfish, the afternoon freaking the fuck out after discovering her hedge witch doubles as a stocker at Walgreens and literally snatching her bald, the evening flouncing around dressed like a drunken streetwalker from the '80s, the night getting into yet another horrible and pointless fight with Sam, and ends things by drunk driving her car into a tree to avoid hitting a strange goat-legged woman standing in the middle of the road with a hog as large as a VW Bug. The fact that she's played by an absolutely filthy [Helena Cain](#) means that she actually exists, and is in fact dreadfully important, and the smirk on her face as she walks away from the wreck promises us that Tara's about five seconds from finding out how scary real magic can be.

*Come back on Friday for the full detailed recap. Until then, see what our [vlogger thinks about Bill's accent](#).*

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

*The Bad & The Beautiful* was a 1952 Vincent Minelli MGM film starring Lana Turner and Kirk Douglas. It was like *Citizen Kane*, but with Hollywood types doing the remembering: the writer, the actress, the director. The main character, Jonathan Shields, is a Hollywood scion and movie producer whose downturn in luck has caused another exec to bring his three victims together to help him make a new movie. They flashback to the various ways in which he created their fortunes, and betrayed them. It won five Oscars, and is a record holder for most awards won without being nominated for Best Picture. I don't know anybody that's ever seen it, but it's good: they're totally successful because of the bullshit he put them through, but they can barely even see straight about him, even years later, because he broke their hearts. He created them while he was destroying them, and they couldn't even see it:

It's barely dawn and Sookie is, since it's the beginning of an episode of *True Blood*, screaming bloody murder. This time it's because of naked Sam at the foot of her bed like the loveliest Christmas gift of a lifetime. When she demands to know what the hell he's doing there, he's still a little sleepy: "Nothing! Sleeping!" Sookie's next question is less humorous for being more understandable: "Did you touch me?" One day she'll wake up and that won't be the closest nightmare to hand. "Sookie, listen. Bill asked me to look after you while he was away..." Sookie, flattening herself against the headboard, every inch of her as far from him as possible, shivers and gasps: "Did he ask you to do it buck naked?" Man, even in PTSD she's awesome. "I want you out of here," she declares with her resolved face, and he shakes his head like a frustrated puppy:

"Now listen! Listen, Sookie, I need to tell you something about me. Something I've never told another person..." The last person who invaded her house, when she thought she was safe, killed her cat and left her body to be found, in the dark. "Oh my God, it's you! You're the murderer!" He reaches for her, and she slaps him, throwing herself off the bed: "Oh my God, you killed my grandmother!" Into the bathroom, where she quickly jumps behind the shower curtain and grabs a loofah. Not quite a murderous length of chain, but you can't always hit them out of the park. Eventually Sookie peeks around the curtain, horribly slowly, and there on the floor is Dean the border collie, looking up at her with sad eyes. Sam whines, and becomes a man. Standing in front of her, breathing hard, he swears he's not the killer. "I'm a shapeshifter," he says intensely, and Sookie smiles in wonder and bemusement, then becomes afraid as the world gets bigger again, and finally wrinkles her lip in derision. "Shut the fuck up."

-- Page 2 --

We're defined in a very small way by the stories we love. Like, that line would be a lot funnier to me if she hadn't said "Shut up!" when she met Bill, or if *Buffy* hadn't said, "Get out!" in the same intonation on the night she met Dracula. Still, it's good. It's Sookie to a T, the Sookie she's becoming, and I like that. Or how, in the movie, Lafayette likes Georgia's story best: the starlet-turned-slut-turned-star. He's old-school and he loves his vicious bitches; he loves to see the goddess in women because while he loves the women in them, he doesn't have a use for them. His highest forms of compliment are in likening them to himself: *Hooker, Skank, Tramp*. He loves the old bitches because they give voice to something wonderful and angry and beautiful inside him; because they are beloved in a way he can only find in corners and nooks and secret places. For my part, I like the director's story. Making a movie about shapeshifters -- okay? -- they realize something very important, something that we've been talking about since the first episode. They do a spell:

*And what scares the human race more than any other single thing?*

*The dark.*

*Of course. And why? Because the dark has a life of its own. In the dark, all sorts of things come alive.*

*Now, what'll we put on the screen that'll make the backs of their necks crawl?*

*Two eyes shining in the dark.*

*A dog frightened, growling, showing its fangs.*

*A bird, its neck broken, feathers torn from its throat.*

*A little girl screaming, claw marks down her cheeks:*

Miss Jeanette lays out a bunch of stuff, tools of the trade: sweetgrass and sage, knives; she shakes out a little cloth baggie and Tara asks what it's for. "Give me your hand," Jeanette says. The sun is coming up. Tara asks her why, and Miss Jeanette gets harsh: "'Why, why, why. Why's it have to be in the woods? Why's it have to be before dawn? Why 799.95?'" Tara rolls her eyes. "Why, why, why. You think knowing the answers will save you?" Yes. That's the problem here. "Shut up and give me your hand." She spits in Tara's palm and she recoils. "Oh, you nasty bitch!" Miss Jeanette doesn't even crack a smile: "That's cleaner than anything you've ever touched." Tara grunts, but settles. "Hold it over the fire. Keep it there." She throws herbs into the fire; sparks fly up:

-- Page 3 --

"Angelica root and spit. A lot stronger than holy water. You got poison oozing out your pores." Tara's grossed out. "You live near the highway?" She doesn't. "Cook with a microwave? Or talk on a cell phone?" And that's when I stopped trusting Miss Jeanette, because that's some Amy Burley talk right there. You either love the world or you don't. You start drawing lines and you see how regularly they line up around whatever suits you best. "Who doesn't?" Miss Jeanette doesn't. "All that pollution and technology, that's how demons travel." Oh, I don't trust you anymore, Miss Jeanette. That's some backwards fucking talk. That's not the speech of a woman who lives in a crooked little bus in the crooked moonlit woods, letting the ivy come in. That's the speech of a woman who knows better than nature:

"That's why I stay away out here in the woods, away from civilization." She flaps at the flames with one crooked hand, wafting the fumes from the fire toward Tara. "Rub it on your face. You make sure to get around your eyes, that's the demon's doorways." Two eyes, shining in the dark. Tara pats it on, gingerly and sweet, like a facial mask, as Miss Jeanette opens up a tiny apothecary bottle, and hands it over. Tara does; she chokes on it. "Jesus, what the hell is it?" Snake juice. "It's made from snakes?" Miss Jeanette shakes her head. "No. It snakes down *in* you. Coils around that evil and rips it out." Tara gags, but she urges her on. She puts it to her mouth and drinks it down. Whatever you are, that's what it shows you:

V, dripping out of the IV into a silver thimble; Eddie stirs, in pain and out of it, and says Jason's name softly. Amy's hate is careless as she drains him. "If I were you, I'd get my filthy mind off of him." Eddie moans, waking from nightmares to something worse. Her again. "What was it that you vampires say? Jason is *mine*." Eddie's grossed out, and swears it's not like that, not this boy, not this time, not for this reason: "He's a good person." Amy laughs as she tends to him. "Are you implying that I'm not?" Eddie suggests that, in a certain

context where Amy is planning on using him up and murdering him, while Jason is not, there's a possibility. But we're in Amy's world now:

"Sophomore year of college, I walked away from a full academic scholarship so I could go to this Guatemalan village." She ties him off. "Helped them build their very first irrigation system so they could have fresh water. Crops that didn't give them dysentery. So don't you *dare*..." -- She grabs at his face; he groans, afraid -- "...Get morally superior on me. I am an organic vegan, and my carbon footprint is *minuscule*." And in Amy world, that's the difference, and for all her bullshit I have to say the logic is solid: "Because I know that ultimately, we're all just a single living being... But *you are not*." That's true, I can see that. Vampires aren't about life, they're about death. Whether or not he's a person, he's been evicted from Gaia, like Pluto from the solar system. If all we have is nature, than the supernatural is unimportant and can be discarded. We have all the magic we need. She pounds on his bicep, shocking and scaring him. "You got a clot forming," she says, and tends to him. He moans in pain. "There. Okay, I need tape. Keep it at that angle." He groans, with his arm out, and she goes to a desk drawer, to find a way to keep him viable:

-- Page 4 --

An empty four-pack of TruBloods, rattling around in a drawer. She's stricken still for a moment. "Jason, Jason, Jason." Eddie pleads: he was half-dead, Jason was only helping, trying to help. He's like a little boy. "He should've told me about this. Why wouldn't he tell me about this?" she asks, turning honestly wounded eyes on her prey. "I won't tell him if you won't," Eddie says, panicking. Amy confides: "Withholding is tantamount to lying, and I can't have that in our relationship." She shakes her head sadly: "This is so beneath us." You have to be pretty fucking amazing, which Lizzy Caplan is, to juggle these balls: Henry Winter, Annie Wilkes, Living Liberal Zombie Nightmare, Jealous Girlfriend, Good Friend, Unpracticed Compartmentalizing Milgram Authority. There's an easy joke in every scene, an obvious way to play it too hard; it's easy to just pick what kind of freak to be in every scene and go for it, and Lord knows it's easy enough to do that to her, as a viewer. But you have to be pretty much freakishly perfect -- and this is why I've been following my girl Janis devotedly for almost ... shit, *ten years now*, from 1999: from *Freaks & Geeks* and *Once & Again* and *Smallville* (which I actually stopped watching when she died) even unto *Tru Calling* and *Related*, and my personal favorite, *The Pitts* -- to stay human in the middle of it all:

"Jason loves you. He never cared about anyone before. He even thinks that you might be the one." Amy is suspicious a moment -- "You talk about me with him?" -- before giving in, turning inside. "And he said that, he said that he thinks that I might be the one?" Eddie's getting stronger: "Amy. If I die here, Jason will never forgive you. Even if he wanted to. He's not as evolved as you are." And again, the secret to Amy is that this makes her just as sad as anything else, because it violates the rules of the universe she's constructed for herself as bad as vampires did Bon Temps; she's nearly weeping as Eddie's eyes bug out at how fucked up she is: "I know."

Sam sits in the rocker on the porch, waiting for the dawn; Sookie stares down at him, nervously fidgeting. "A shapeshifter?" Sam nods, and says mostly they just say "shifter"; there's no way of knowing how many there are, but maybe tens of thousands; it's hereditary... He looks around guiltily, as if about to tell a lie; as if it's too hard to talk about. "Um, I was adopted. And the family that took me in... We just never talked about it." His shame and sadness are no match for Sookie's curiosity. "Can you turn into anything? Like

cats? Birds?" A cat would have helped, last night. "Cats, sure... Yeah, I can do bird, but flying's hard. Dog's the easiest for me." Why? "People like dogs. Most other animals leave you alone..." Sookie's suddenly weirded out: "I used to scratch your belly in the parking lot at the bar!" Sam laughs, and explains that was the brother dog, so happy to be telling her, telling somebody, finally less alone: "I need a live animal in order to shift. You know, as a model. Kind of like an imprint?" But Sookie knows about shapeshifters. Not the Sam kind, but she knows:

-- Page 5 --

"Can you turn into another person?" He already has. Twice in one night. Sam shakes his head. "Humans are too complex. Despite what you might see at the bar." He smiles, but she's not picking up what he's putting down. She stays focused -- "So what's it like to sleep in the ground?" -- as much in love with the secrets and mysteries as she's terrified by them. Her life has been characterized by systematically learning and dealing with the most horrible thoughts and qualities of everyone she comes into contact with. It's rare she gets to learn something new, and when presented with it, no matter how scary it gets, no matter how big the world will get when her body starts to panic, for a moment she's lost in the learning. "Can you do it any time, or... What?" Sam explains that he can, although obviously it wears off when he sleeps, and he can't control it during the full moon. "Like a werewolf?" she asks, and he barks. "We're *not* werewolves. Okay, werewolves are dangerous, nasty creatures. *Do not call me a werewolf.*" He shakes, with the need to protect her and the need to impress this upon her and most of all the terrible need for her to never look at him that way again: as a beast, as a thing that crept into her bed. Werewolves are bad, dangerous, hungry, like vampires. Sam is loyal, protective, attentive, like a dog. Sookie just stares at him: "Werewolves exist *too?*" Shit is getting White Wolf up in here. He nods. "Wh-what else is there?" she asks, quieter, starting to get scared. The novelty is wearing off in the time it takes to go from dogs to wolves. Sam shakes his head, thinking about the things he's seen. "More than you can imagine." More than you would want to:

He swallows, trying not to think about it, and she stomps away. After a few seconds he joins her on Bill's front steps. "I can't... Life is just getting too weird too fast..." Valid. Every time she learns something, somebody dies. But if the world is sufficiently big, then there's a hope in this, somehow: "Could a werewolf have killed Gran?" Could something have just come out of the darkness, randomly, and made of her an orphan, something mindless and magical, that can be put back into the darkness with a silver bullet and a prayer? He tries to be nice and allows for the possibility, but it's a weak response. Sookie commences flipping out, putting her head in her lap, hiding from enormity:

"Oh my God. Bill's been dragged off by vampires, and now I find out you're something I never even knew existed..." She starts to sob, drily, and jerks away from his touch, yelping in fear. "I thought you of all people would understand," Sam says softly, and she turns on him. "Why? Because I'm dating a vampire?" Um, no, because you're totally psychic and everybody thinks you're a freak? "I don't hide who I am!" she shouts, heading for the door. Which is true: she doesn't have the option. Only the shame of bearing it, alternately scaring people and making them point and laugh, depending on their faith. "I've wanted to tell you for years," Sam says, about one more thing, and she whirls back, shouting. "I kissed you! And I know you wanted to do more than that. Were you gonna tell me before? Or after?" She slams the door and he sits on the porch, alone again somehow; feeling burnt and sick. *I'm just looking for something real*, they said, and: *If we do this, we did this:*

Miss Jeanette smudges the circle while Tara shakes on the ground, wriggling, sickened and groaning: "Spit, smoke, root." Water, air and earth. "Cleanse the body, cleanse the soul. Snake, seek, search, find, bring it to the light. Ohhh, the light..." It starts to come; Tara groaning and cramping on the ground: "Fuck, my stomach!" She's got the bends, digging herself up from the deepest places, the darkest place, where she put the demon. "It's angry," Miss Jeanette says. "It's digging its claws in, so it can hold on. Don't you fight back! Let your body be the battleground." It always was. When people talk about their alcoholic parents, they're never talking about the alcohol:

"You let that demon destroy itself," Miss Jeanette commands, and Tara suddenly sits up. "I feel sick..." Miss Jeanette watches her heave, pushing and straining to bring it up. Her body was the battleground. That smart little girl, breaking her mother's bottles, fighting the demon before it had a name. Lettie Mae was her maker, so entranced by the eyes looking back at her in the dark that she couldn't even see her daughter except as another problem. She changed her daughter, broke her apart, and in doing so she broke herself. She was a pale caretaker and a monstrous maker. She was a vampire:

At Georgia's house, Jonathan took out one of her famous actor father's dramatic recordings, and played it, to make a point: *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene v. It's about a woman who died too late. She helped destroy her husband while she was creating him:

*"She should have died hereafter. There would have been a time for such a word... And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death... Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing..."*

"Let it go, let it go. Let it go. Let go of all that sickness, all that rage, all that anger, all that hate, all that self-pity. It's just fuel for the demon inside of you." Tara finally barfs for like a million years, when Miss Jeanette standing above her. "Come forth, demon! Leave this child in peace! Come into the light! Show yourself!" A child walks out of the forest, jumping in space and time, black-eyed and small, afraid, weak. Tara shakes her head and Miss Jeanette asks her what she sees. "Momma," says the demon quietly. "It's me, standing right over there," she says, nearly weeping. "It's me." Miss Jeanette shakes her head. "The demon will take on any form to stay alive. It knows your weaknesses. It preys on your fears." They're both right:

Miss Jeanette puts a ritual knife into her hand, clasping fingers around it. "Only you can destroy it." Let your body be the battleground. The little girl is so sad, and beautiful, and scared. Tara walks toward her where she shivers, but turns back to look at Miss Jeanette, unsure. "Don't let it fool you, Tara Mae! You stand up to that demon." Tara comes closer to the baby, takes her knife in hand. "No, Momma! Please, don't hurt me!" Miss Jeanette screams from the fire: "One of you must die!" Tara shrieks, stabbing the little girl before she falls upon the ground. She stares at the knife, at the spirit blood dripping from it, and reaches out blindly into the space where she once was, screaming her demons. Singing the night that made her. Miss Jeanette caresses her hair, pulls her to her thigh like a daughter, like a little girl. Grand and reverent music glides into the sky, looking down on them with

hateful amusement. "Good girl. Good girl, good girl. Good girl. It's all over now. That demon is gone forever."

Your brain is like an iceberg: little tiny-tippy top that you live on, balancing precariously, cold as ice, bobbing along ignoring the fathoms and fathoms below you, that are also you. You could spend your whole life sitting up there, and a lot of us do, in denial of all the things down in the water we don't want to know about. Your soul, your real mind, is down there: richly associative, thinking in images and metaphors and beautiful music. You spend a third of every day letting it play, and bringing up little stories that don't make sense in the sunlight. But if you're strong and smart you dive down and bring things up on purpose, and you make your life better, and you make your life make sense. The trick is to forget it afterward; make it look like you didn't do anything, and go on with your life. It's harder than it might seem. But in the end magic's just another way of talking to that vaster and more beautiful part of your soul, and bringing something back:

When you walk through the woods in a fairy tale, when you meet Miss Jeanette just past the crossroads, when you take Communion, you're telling that part of yourself a story, and you're getting untold riches back. It can feel like barfing up a snake as long as your life, black as sin and strong as shame; it can feel like laughing about how stupid you were to be afraid; it can feel like remembering something you've always known; it can feel like talking to the demon in the basement until you've grown enough to love it; it can feel like watching your bedroom enveloped in primordial forests, wrapping around you in love, love, love, and all the sparks that jump between us. What it doesn't feel like is a trip to McDonald's, which is what Tara thinks this is. And Amy and Jason, sucking down their liquid divinity like meth addicts at the one-stop shop down in the basement where dreams live. Treat it like an ending, bought and paid for, and not another step in a journey that never ends -- treat it like a garbage dump where you leave things, and not a meal to take in and keep moving -- and you'll float away on that ice floe, forgotten and cold and alone forever:

-- Page 8 --

"You spend more time on your hair than any man I've ever met," Amy says indulgently, watching Jason preen in the mirror. "The trick is to make it look like you didn't do nothing. It's harder than it might seem." She grins; he doesn't need any help looking good. She notices the toilet seat, standing at attention, and her smile falls into disgust. He's not as evolved as she'd like him to be. She's just as angry and sad as she would be at something real, because in Amy world we put the seat down. "I think I might have had one too many beers last night. I feel like I been shot at and missed, shit at and hit!" Colorful, Jay. Amy sits down and looks at him; wonders how to bring him back in. How she can redefine the world for them both before the demon in the basement breaks it all apart:

"We need to talk about Eddie." Jason agrees; he turns on the tap. "Well, I've been thinking. The way we've been treating him, it's just really uncivilized, you know?" Jason nods petulantly: he does know that. "We can't let him go, of course, but we can try to make things just a little bit more comfortable for him. Do you know what Stockholm Syndrome is?" Jason turns around and takes a swing: "It's a disease?" Amy nods and course-corrects: "Well, not exactly..." He makes that face he makes, a swing and a miss. "It's something that happens to people who are kidnapped. It's like over time, they start to get closer to their kidnappers. It's kind of like ... being part of a family." Jason lights up. It's like Pluto, coming home. It's like having a family, like being a man, like Rene. People that count on you, and tell you what being a man is:

"All we need to do is make Eddie love us. And he *already* loves you," she says, pushing the button. Jason quirks a suspicious eyebrow and turns back around. "And then eventually, we wouldn't have to keep him locked up," she says, spinning tales for Jason, readjusting their course. "He could just be in the house with us, like he's..." Jason nearly jumps for joy: "Like a pet!" Yeah. "And we could travel with him..." Jason's loving it, nearly punching the air. "We could sell his blood, you know, when we need money, and just live out of backpacks and see the whole world! We just need boots, and a map." The best liars believe what they're selling. She's such a total Cylon, like, *This was the plan all along! We just didn't know that until just now: we'll keep him as a pet!* But if nothing is true and everything's permitted, then there's no shame in changing Amy world to suit whatever needs to happen next. If she doesn't get Jason on board with keeping Eddie, at least in the short term, then something bad will happen to the world. This story may not stay true, but it's true for now:

-- Page 9 --

"I ain't never seen snow," Jason says, getting into it, and Amy gets expansive: "Tibet. We can climb the Himalayas, we can visit the Dalai Lama... Jason's totally on the same page: "And snowboard naked!" Amy, convinced he's convinced, stands. "Right, I gotta go to the store, I want to get Eddie some TruBloods." Jason's so ecstatic that she kisses him. "I love you," she says, and for the moment everything makes sense, and she's pulled it off: all he sees are her two eyes, shining in the dark. She's more real than anybody else. He tells her he loves her, still surprised by how easy it is to say, and at the last second she twists it: "I love you more." He makes a "You got me again Cecil," Liz Lemon kind of face, but he'll figure that one out eventually. The important thing is that everything is safe, and there aren't any secrets, and he wasn't wrong about Amy. Eddie was. "Oh my God," he says delightedly into the mirror, "You are even better looking than you were yesterday." He's been reborn; he's pushed all the bad down deep:

Tara wakes Lettie Mae calmly, with the sun behind her head, coming up, and the tears on her face drying. The tears in her throat are still there, singing love, love, love. "Mama. Mama, wake up." Lettie Mae opens her eyes slowly, wondering where her baby's been. "I had the exorcism," Tara says, and the ridiculous Jesus music swells with a sneer. "Tara, are you...?" She nods: "It worked, Mama. It worked." Lettie Mae decides that Jesus has answered her prayers, because the dawn has come and gone. "We're saved," she cries, hugging her daughter. "Both of us are saved! You did a brave thing, Tara Mae. I am so proud of you, my baby..." Tara shakes her head, shamed. "My whole life, I thought you didn't... I thought..." Lettie Mae puts her hand over her daughter's mouth, shaking her head in just about the nastiest, grossest way and smiles. "I forgive you." Fuck that. I forgive you for assuming that your behavior was having a negative effect on my life and development? Demon or not, another word for parenting is *self-control*, and if having a kid doesn't give you that, you were not made for children and you don't deserve to have them. "Get dressed. I'm taking you out to celebrate, anywhere you wanna go." They bounce around the house for a sec before Lettie Mae suggests Mamaw's Mudbugs. It's in Keatchie; she wonders if that's too far to drive. "Are you kidding? I'd drive anywhere for you!" They embrace again, and she watches her mom run around excitedly, and wonders why she still feels so tired and sad, now that she's been saved. We're all, right now, every age we've ever been, somewhere inside. Somewhere inside a thing rises up, afraid and wounded, still bleeding, and she tells her to go back, far below the depths, because she has been saved, go to sleep.

-- Page 10 --

They call these parties "fais-do-do"; they started before the second World War. In France they still tell their babies *do-do*, as in "dormir," as in: "go to sleep, go to sleep." You fry up a bunch of Cajun crap and drink a lot of beer and dance, and when the children complain you tell your babies to go to sleep, go to sleep, before your husband finds somebody else to dance with. Sam's hanging lanterns for the *fais-do-do* while Bill's away and the sun's still up, but Sookie won't help. "Kind of busy right now setting up your bar." Sam rolls his eyes, stuck up a ladder, and Terry helps Sookie out. "Thank you, Terry. You are so sweet. And reliable!" Terry's confused; normally she's a little wary of him. You don't want to hear what's in his head. Things hurt enough. "I always know what to expect from you. No nasty surprises!" She launches it up at Sam, like daggers. "That's just because you don't know me very well," he says. Sookie's like, *weird*. He hates being this way.

Arlene arrives, full of compliments hiding pin-turn adjustments and suggestions and wouldn't-it-bes and how-bout-wes, until Sam finally just laughs and asks her what the hell she wants from him. "A debutante ball," Terry says, and Arlene smiles her special Terry smile: "Hug your neck, you know exactly what I'm talking about!" He always does. Sam looks at Terry, still grinning, and wonders how he knew. "My cousin Portia was a deb in Shreveport when she turned eighteen. Every Bellefleur woman's been doing it since they started having them before the Revolutionary War." Sam offers that it's nice to come from such an old family as the Bellefleurs, as the flashback camera closes in on him. Especially one God's kept such a good eye on. "All families are old, Sam. Some just keep better records..." It's nice to come from someplace at all:

Sam flopped on the couch, shaking, seizing; a tiny cute puppy growled and barked at him, shaking, stuck to the spot. His mother yelled from the other room for him to shut the dog up, but he couldn't. He couldn't move. When she came in to check on them, Sam flopped to the floor, and she screamed. His chattering turned to yips and the yips turned to growls, and he rose on all fours, and booked it for the back yard; he tore off his shirt as he was running, and his mother followed after. And under the moon, he shed his clothes and his skin, and went running into the night, and she cried out to God with her hand over her mouth... And Arlene snaps him out of it, screaming to get Sam's barking dog away from her, keep the red and green lanterns apart, the colors separated, the scallops smaller and more gingerbread-like. She brings him back, from memories and pain, back to the obligations and the friendships and the relationships he's trying to build, she brings him into the world:

-- Page 11 --

"Don't shut me out, please," says Georgia on the TV. Lafayette grins, as Lila appears at the top of the stairs: "Uh-oh, Georgia, your replacement just showed up!" He knows the next line, the best line: "*Thought you said you were gonna get rid of her quick.*" Lafayette cracks up, waxing his chest: "Bitch! I love you, you scandalous whore! Take your man! *Take his ass...*" Out the window, a car drives up: it's the senator. Lafayette nods to himself and rips off the last waxing strip. "The picture's finished, Georgia. You're business. I'm company," Lila sneers, and Jonathan tells her to get upstairs: to take her cheapness and her dinginess and all the things he tries to hide from the world, and secret them back, up and away. And honey you know Lafayette isn't having that. He tries to show Lila a better way, sauntering to the door by way of example: "You better *walk* down them stairs, like..." She doesn't. As she's raining down nastiness on her rival, Lafayette opens the door to his own little Jonathan Shields. "I can't stay long..." the senator says, and Lafayette rubs up against him, a thousand feet of muscle. "Boyfriend, I can make you stay longer than you ever thought you

could." Why hide, when you can have anything you want? Here's why Lafayette loves Lila best:

**Gaucho:** Don't talk like that about Georgia! Or Jonathan, he's a great man.  
**Lila, laughing:** There *are* no great men, buster. There's only men.

"Actually, I had something else in mind," says the senator, and takes out a wad of cash. "A little, uh, v-juice?" Lafayette shrugs and wrinkles his lip: "Sold out." He turns off the TV and stretches out on the couch. He is very tall, very long; the senator's only a man. "My supplier only comes out after dark, if you know what I mean." The senator's got a speech tonight; he's disappointed and Lafayette grins at him indulgently: "You got stage fright? I could help you with that." He puts the money in his pocket and drops to his knees. "You know I can." He takes off the senator's belt, slowly, and drags him off and away, and the senator giggles that he can't mess up his suit. And Lila heads back up the stairs.

"I love how Mamaw's Mudbugs is exactly the same as when we used to go there when I was little," Tara says. Her salvation, like her mother's, is a time machine. Go back to before the first pain, the first remembered fracture. Just go back. "Yeah," Lettie Mae says, sucking the head of a ... okay, I lived in Houston for seven years and this still gives me the wiggins. Stop eating insects. It's no different from the monkey brains of *Indiana Jones*. Crustaceans are fucking grosser than catfish. I was going to try to think of an animal that evolved to eat shit and other animals' garbage on the riverbed and lakefloor, until I realized God already thought of that, and they're called crustaceans, and I'm sorry if I'm drawing lines in the Gaia like Amy Burley, but *they are shit-eating insects*, and then you suck their little heads out of their nasty little necks? I can't say I'm down with the whole of Leviticus, but I have to think it's at least 90% aesthetics. My God. "Yeah, I until I lost my license. First thing in the morning, I'm going down to DMV..." The entire bucket of crawdads she was just eating repeat on her, and she groans, burping. Nice. "...Maybe one bucket was enough..." Tara, at least, reminds her she shouldn't suck the heads, but Lettie Mae's in serious pain, so Tara pulls over to get her some Pepto. The DeSoto pharmacy, somewhere between Keatchie and Bon Temps, past the row houses; somewhere past the crossroads:

-- Page 12 --

Georgia's first screen test was a disaster, so Shields gives her a little tip: be more coy, not to even look up from the pulp novel she was reading, as the well-dressed man entered the scene. The trick is to make it look like you didn't do anything; it's harder than it might seem. She nailed it the second time. Without even looking up, she said her line: "Read any good books lately?" And lightning struck. This happened in a drug store:

"Excuse me, what aisle's the Pepto-Bismol on?" A woman in a pharmacy smock stands on a stepping ladder at the back of the store, so she doesn't turn around right away; her name is Nancy, and she's wearing lipstick and red plastic-framed glasses. She looks like somebody's mother, someone's aunt. "Aisle 7," she says, and points with a smile. "I know you," Tara says, and Nancy steps away and down quickly, heading away from her: "No, I'm sure you've mistaken me for someone else." They're both right:

"Miss Jeanette," Tara says, more shocked than horrified, and Nancy tells her she's wrong. She tries to get up an aisle, but Tara chases her; she cuts her off midway through the store and fully snatches her bald! In the daytime she's not a witch at all; she walks tall and straight and lovely. "Hey! You took advantage of my momma!" Nancy jumps back, terrified,

and tells Tara not to touch her. Tara pushes her back into an endcap, scattering stuff all over the floor. "Don't touch you? I ought to kill you, you fake, lying bitch." Nancy threatens to call the police, and Tara offers to call them herself: "Tell 'em how you charged me \$800 to spit in my face and poison me!" When you put it like that, it doesn't look like magic at all, not if you never knew what magic was:

"What was in that shit you gave me, that snake juice?" Nancy swears it was just ipecac, and a small amount of peyote: perfectly safe, but Tara's not feeling her. "I puked my guts out! I hallucinated *stabbing a little girl!*" Nancy blushes, embarrassed. "What the fuck kind of person are you?!" asks Tara. As though Nancy was the one that invented Miss Jeanette:

"Look. I got a son in prison, another one in Iraq, I got a daughter with diabetes, and three grandbabies I gotta take care of. I do what I have to for my family, same as you." And for yours, but you forgot that part. (Also, way to be every stereotype at once!) Tara stalks away, whining and crying, explaining how badly she's misunderstood it all: "I actually believed you had fixed me. Oh my God, I am such a fucking dumbass!" As though it was Miss Jeanette that fixed her, that fixes her, that goes on fixing her. Tara whirls back around at Nancy's voice. Look, Miss Jeanette says. Listen, Miss Jeanette says:

-- Page 13 --

"Listen. Just because Miss Jeanette ain't real doesn't mean she can't help people. You saw how it worked for your momma. She still sober?" Yes. Cased closed. Sing the night that made you. "Once she finds out about you, she'll be drinking again!" I'll bring it all down, if it's not real. I've always thought the perfect balance between Sookie and Tara was the way Sookie can't stop listening and Tara can't stop talking; Tara says the things Sookie can't say, and Sookie feels the things Tara can't feel. But this is true too: If it's not real, if it's destructible, Tara Mae will bring it down. And once you destroy the whole world -- when you discover that holy madness she's racing toward at a thousand miles an hour -- you can find truth. If you survive the journey. "Well, maybe she don't have to find out? Faith's a powerful thing." Can you lie to save a life? Nancy can. Tara can't, because what makes you awesome is always also what makes you suck. She shoves the wig into Nancy's stomach like a blade and stomps off, singing her favorite song as Nancy stares after, tired and sympathetic and sad and lonely: "Fuck fuck fuck fuck."

Georgia shouted at Jonathan, to turn off the record player, the stop that song about Lady MacBeth, who destroyed as she was creating; to stop the voice of her broken father in its tracks. She wanted to take on all the horror of her father's dissolution -- the drinking, the whoring -- but none of the glory; it made Shields scream. "Make up your mind! You hate him, and you build this shrine to him. He died over ten years ago and you've been holding your own private wake ever since. You can't be a star in a cemetery! Because he was a drunk, you're a drunk. Because he loved women, you're a tramp. But you forget one thing. He did it with style."

"You're a Lorrison," he said: "Haunted, born to live by make-believe."

"Look at you," he said. "You're acting now, playing the doomed daughter of the great man. Well, let me tell you something: The acting isn't good enough. It's the cheap performance of a bit player, not a star. And that's all it'll ever be, until you can pull yourself out of this tomb."

He said: "Until you can see people as they really are, yourself as you really are, until you can do this to your father's picture..." -- and he drew a mustache on her father's portrait -- "...And laugh the way he would have laughed. That's not a God talking, Georgia, that's only a man." He smashed the phonograph record, her master's voice; she threw a liquor bottle at him, and attacked.

-- Page 14 --

**Shields:** Georgia, no more doom daughter, no more whimpering, no more drinking...  
**Georgia:** And no more men?

Tara slams the door and drives away: "They're out." They don't have what can fix you. We thought there was medicine, we thought there was salvation, that thing in your gut, that nasty old snake would stop turning and twisting in you, but it was a mistake. They're all out of salvation today.

Rene and Arlene are adorable, dancing, and Andy Bellefleur's drinking a Diet Coke; Sookie's on the sidelines as always, drinking Orange Crush in a bottle. Terry wanders up and doesn't say anything for awhile; they look at each other like the two village idiots that they are, and finally he explains that he would be asking her to dance, except he doesn't dance. She thanks him anyhow, and attempts to have a conversation with him. "Sometimes, crowds makes me feel guilty for not having fun like everyone else? And then I feel guilty for feeling guilty." Terry responds to this open-handed sort of friendliness with another non sequitur: "Guilt is a useless emotion." She considers him; he looks particularly fucked up right now. "Or so I've heard." Sookie wishes Bill were there, desperately pleased to have someone to talk to. "There's some dead people I wish was still around too," he says, staring at a desert a million miles away, and wanders off.

**Flesh Fair!** Vampires are so ridiculous and they all drive vintage autos, including a disproportionate number of convertibles. There's a scary old hobo clown-looking one, a few hundred white trash strippers, some grunge refugees, a bunch of beer-belly truckers, some people from

"If you don't let me go, she's going to kill me." Jason swears she wouldn't, but Eddie repeats his opinion that she is a psychopath. "Jason, we're late!" Amy calls, down the stairs, and bounds down to say goodbye to Eddie over the banister: "We'll see you in a few hours... I was thinking, we could bring one of the TVs down here. Does that sound good?" Eddie just lays there, completely wigged by her change of heart, thinking it's not real. He doesn't understand that when all the lines are erased every lie is as good as every other lie, which means she's not lying at all. Everything is permitted. Jason looks down at Eddie as Amy scampers away, toward the *fais-do-do*, and promises him he's wrong about her. Eddie lies, alone, a demon in a basement, and listens to his phone, ringing out of reach.

-- Page 16 --

"Eddie, where you at? I'm at your crib, the door was wide open. This is fucked up as fuck. Call me when you get this message, bitch." Lafayette paces around Eddie's house, nervous and worried for a variety of reasons. The rug is all curled up where they kidnapped him, the remote is broken on the floor. "Jason fucking Stackhouse, you bigmouth motherfucker..."

Arlene begs Rene to let her rest, stop dancing for awhile, but he pushes: "What, you won't dance with me? That's a fine thing at your own fais do-do!" She rubs his weird little goat beard, like for luck, and sends him to dance with Sookie, awesome: "Poor thing's got nobody here. Everyone's afraid of her!" She pushes him but he goes, smiling, and tells Sookie she looks lonely as a cloud. He leads her to the floor and Sookie tells him that Arlene's one lucky lady; when he bashfully says not everyone likes a coonass like him, she immediately says she does. "So does Bill! Rene thinks about how to approach it, now that she's opened the door, and mumbles a bit at first. "I don't have nothing against vampires, you know that. But you're a good girl, Sookie. I think you deserve better." She's about to tell him what for when Sam appears and cuts in; Rene twirls her into Sam's arms and her face becomes a mask. It's adorable; it's as cold as a new razor blade. He begs her to stop stonewalling him -- "It's not fair, you being mad about something I can't help" -- and she finally looks at him: "I'm mad that you didn't trust me enough to tell me. You hid the most important thing about yourself!"

Sam protests that it hardly matters, since she's with Bill now, and she retorts that he didn't tell her about Tara, either. "Because there's nothing to tell!" he says, lying, and she asks if Tara's aware of the "nothing" she represents. "Or the fact that you can turn into a dog?" He says it's none of Tara's business, and finally gets tired of the bullshit. "And you know what, I didn't tell you because I knew this is how you'd react. But you're right. I didn't trust you, I trusted my instincts, and they were dead-on." Nicely done! He storms off and she feels like a dick.

*Now, what'll we put on the screen that'll make the backs of their necks crawl?  
A dog: frightened, growling, showing its fangs.*

Jonathan Shields screamed, from the center of himself, from the center of all the armor: "Who gave you the right to dig into me and turn me inside out and decide what I'm like? How do you know how I feel about you, how deep it goes? Maybe I don't want anybody to own me. You or anybody. Get out! Get out! Get out!"

-- Page 17 --

Amy heads out to get another beer, and touches Jason's neck; he shies away bashfully, ashamed to look kept in front of Rene and Hoyt. She stalks away, wondering if Eddie's to blame. Hoyt smiles sweetly, saying Amy's his favorite of all Jason's girlfriends; he asks how they met and Jason wavers. "Uh, it's kind of embarrassing. Fangtasia." Rene jumps, asking what the hell he was doing, going there. Jason lies, saying it was to see a band. Rene calls him a brave motherfucker, but Jason plays it off: "It's just a bunch of losers wearing black. Amy and I could tell just by looking at each other we didn't really belong there..." Rene stares at him, but Hoyt's pinned to the punchline: "...Never did see the band." Jason grins and Hoyt gushes: "Oh God, I wanna be you!" So does Jason. Rene asks if she's the one, and Jason flips some Cajun food at him, unsure. "Life is short! You find a good one, you keep her." Hoyt nods with Rene, wiping the grease off his hand on his backside to pick up his beer. Jason agrees, and quietly admits he may have lost "the upper hand," you know, in the relationship. He's unsure what it means but he's pretty sure it's happening; nobody plays Jason Stackhouse.

Rene counsels him to take it back: "You just say, 'Woman, this is what I want. This is the way it's gonna be.'" Jason loves the sound of it; he and Hoyt both perk up and listen harder. "And if she don't like it, deep down she'll respect you. She can't help it. It's in her DNA.

Fact." Nobody plays Amy Burley, he doesn't know this about her: the way she creates the entire world and the rest of us must follow in her path, or she'll tear it all down and start again. Nobody knows about the beast in Amy Burley. "Well, now I wanna be you!" Hoyt chirps, and Jason's offended. "And if she don't respect you? She ain't someone that you wanna be with anyway," Rene says, and Hoyt nods sagely. And up behind him comes Maxine, his mom, telling him she knows damn well it's his third beer, which is two too many. "You set that down, right now," she commands, and Hoyt looks to Jason with a brave and wobbly smile. "You know, I plan on having about six more beers. And enough tequila to drown a Mexican sea captain, *woman*." He looks at Jason with first fear and then bravado, and drunkenly pushes past his mother with a little spring in his step.

There's vampires all over the place, every style, like the entire [Petrelli family](#), standing like a portrait. Bill finishes up the story of Long Shadow, and the Magister's not having it. "So: you murdered a higher life form for the sake of your pet. You broke an ancient and fundamental law, you decreased our numbers at a critical time in our history. Very bad." The assembled members of the family watch carefully, wondering what will happen, as Bill points out that Long Shadow broke the law first, just like the preceding criminal: "She was mine, and he knew it. He would have killed her and fed from her..." The Magister cuts in sharply: "-- Hello, *human*? Irrelevant. Happens every day." But what about how he was stealing from Eric? The Magister looks to the Sheriff, and he nods. "Long Shadow was a thief and a liar. He was hurting my business." The Magister reconsiders; Bill pushes his advantage, ordering Eric to tell him why Sookie was there. "The only reason the girl was there was because I called her." Bill: "To protect your wealth," he prods. "To protect my wealth, yes."

-- Page 18 --

Eric weighs the pros and cons of telling the Magister about Sookie's abilities, but can't find the right way to do both without risking the advantage of having her. "She is...Valuable." The Magister points out that humans exist only to serve their people, and Bill disagrees. The crowd gasps in a single shared oh no he didn't, and the Magister gets bitchy. "Do you question my authority? I am the Magister. I was trained in the Inquisition, and I am the adjudicator for every vampire territory in North America. As the humans say -- the humans you love more than your own kind -- *Back your shit down*." First of all, you sound ridiculous, and secondly: who even says that? Bill looks primed to go off, like, "Listen, motherfucker," but Eric shushes him and the Magister laughs.

"Well, you haven't bored me. That works in your favor. And you seem to be obedient to your Sheriff..." Eric agrees... "For the most part." Bill's wounded look at Eric is probably the second-funniest thing in the episode, next to Tara's upcoming outfit, and Eric's like, okay, that was a bit much. "When it matters, yes, he is." The Magister reminds us all of the usual sentence, to a series of gasps and moans: "Five years in a coffin chained with silver, during which time your body will waste to leather and sticks. You'll probably go insane..." Bill kind of freaks out at this point. "However," the Magister continues, twirling his cane: "I'm feeling a bit... Creative." Bill stares at him, in a very close up shot that transitions beautifully back to the *fais-do-do*. Everytime we leave the party, things get worse for everybody, and every time we come back to the party, the music is a little harder, a little scarier and more sexual and driving.

All the boys are doing shots while Arlene sits with Sookie and Amy, a little wobbly and making that drunk girl face like she might burst into tears, such is the depth of her overwhelming emotion. If you learn to recognize that face, it will serve you well, because

nothing good ever comes of that face. "You know what I love most about Rene? Ahem, aside from his fine little Cajun butt! He's good to the kids. You know, he's... he's good to me. All the rest were fixer-uppers. But Rene, he's... He's solid, all the way to the foundation. I can count on him. And I've never had that, in all my life." Oh Lord, here it comes. The overshare and complete meltdown. It's written all over her intense face. Luckily, she's sitting at a picnic table with the two most intense people that have ever lived, so they're going to head her off at the pass.

-- Page 19 --

"Well I know what you mean," Amy says. "I never knew I could have something like what I have with Jason. I'm not about to let anything destroy that," she says, and you have to know Amy better than her friends Arlene and Sookie to understand the darkness that passes over her eyes when she says it. Sookie, trying to be human, attempts once again to have a conversation. As usual, it does not go well: "I don't know anyone can trust anybody these days. They're always keeping things from you, and you don't even know who people are, or what they are..." Amy stares at Sookie and Arlene shrugs, like, "This is why she is the town retard, shit like this." Amy gets them all back on track with the love talk, to Arlene's total gratitude: "Well, you know what I love about Jason? Everything is just right there on the surface. You never have to wonder what he's thinking." Sookie snorts: "Yeah, because he *ain't* thinking." Arlene laughs, impressed and shocked and a little bit in love with Sookie, because Damn. If life were *The Golden Girls*, Sookie Stackhouse would be her Sophia.

And that's when Tara wanders up looking like a total lunatic, and everybody forgets how Sookie's randomly going crazy today, because check it: bizarre bright-red cocktail dress, complicated hairdo with a side ponytail, and makeup that looks like a little girl playing dressup for the first time. This is because Tara is a little girl playing dressup for the first time. She's putting this on like armor, to be a big girl, drunk as shit, wearing makeup nobody taught her to apply, because she never had a mother.

"HEY GIRLFRIENDS WHAT'S UP!" she screams, blowing everybody's minds. They're like, "You look ... *amazing*." She looks like a cocaine nightmare from the '80s crossed with a teenager's vision of streetwalker hos. She is fully incredible. Tara gestures to her ridiculous dress like Romy: "PROM NIGHT 2000. AIN'T WORE IT SINCE." She gulps her drink and rocks unsteadily on her heels. I love Tara Thornton so fucking much. Amy's not blinked once since she tottered up. "Well... It still fits you?" Tara nods blearily and Sookie stands, dragging her cartoonish circus slut friend off for a little talk about self-destructive crazy. "Tara, come here. I've never seen you like this. Is this because of Sam?" From deep inside Tara summons an eloquent The Fuck You Say face, and Sookie explains she saw Tara and Sam macking in the office. "IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS," Tara blurps, and Sookie -- for about sixteen reasons -- tells her dating Sam is maybe not the greatest idea, and Tara points out that Sam's not into, for example, sucking her blood. Sookie wanders away, of course, because you never call a fangbanger one to her face, and Tara forlornly calls after her. When the witch puts a knife in your hand it's classic misdirection: something shiny over here so you don't see the trick over there. When you look at your demon you've got two choices: kill it, or dance with it. If she'd danced with that little girl, she would have been impervious to the disappointment of Nancy -- it wouldn't matter that God isn't a drugstore, that wholeness can't be bought. But she killed her, and now she really is possessed. If the vamps told us one thing when they came out the coffin it's this: we don't bury our dead. We learn to love them.

-- Page 20 --

Andy approaches Sam at the bar, reminding him of how he called the "naked community" in Beaumont and that Sam is a mystery he needs to crack. Sam shrugs, embarrassed, and finally admits a partial truth: "I was adopted. That's the truth. At fifteen, I was on my own." Andy makes that I've Got You Now bullshit face he makes, and presses on, into places nobody should ever go. "Fifteen, huh? Where'd you go? Who took you in? I need to know what your life was. Before you bought up property in Bon Temps, and women started getting killed."

Sam came home the next day, as the moon was waning, and the door was hanging open. He dropped his bike against the siding and carefully went inside, worried and silent. The living room was empty, the dining room was gone, the hearth was cleared of warmth and memories, and all that was left was shelf paper, moving trash and packing stuff. But the most deranged thing of all, the thing that makes this story a fairytale, was his bedroom: untouched. An island in the empty life. The sudden move-out is a theme we see sometimes in these stories, a childhood nightmare come to life. It's the untouched little boy's bedroom that makes this story art.

"Sam. Sam!" He turns around, shocked back into the story. "Where the hell did you come from?" Sam's exasperated, his eyes getting darker. "I come from exactly the same place everybody else comes from, Andy." Andy says there's no previous addresses, no tax records, no social security or credit card bills, before Bon Temps. He created himself from thin air, like a shapeshifter in the night. Like some kind of gypsy boy. "Jesus fuck, Andy!" Tara says, galloping past him to Sam. "Shit. Don't you ever get tired of being in everybody's way?" Andy's taken aback, Diet Coke on his clothes, but Tara ignores him, throwing herself on Sam. "Hey, baby!" He takes her in, her craziness and the bizarre outfit, and doesn't know what to say. Everybody's confused reactions to Tara's total craziness being on the outside instead of the inside for once is the best part of the episode. "Listen," she says, grabbing at his cock. "I have a situation. A very serious situation. And I need your help with it right now." He's forgotten Andy's even there; Andy whines that he's investigating something, and she whips back around to him. "WELL, LET ME WRAP IT UP FOR YOU. HE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING, HE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING, AND HE DOESN'T GIVE A SHIT. COME ON, SAM." She drags him off, and I mean: Juilliard. We need more Rutina Wesleys in this world.

-- Page 21 --

Sam laughs as she shoves him into the office and tries to climb him, and she tells him to shut up and fuck her. "Hey, did you have that exorcism?" She rips at his belt, clawing at his body, and tells him to be normal and get with it. "I'm not a normal guy!" he shouts, and she tells him that's not really material right now. HE shoves her off and whines that he's not a walking dildo that she can use when she's fucked up and sad, and she realizes that he's right. She goes soft. "Sam, please. I'm not right..." But no, he's had it. "You're not the only one with demons! What the fuck do you want from me?" Which is, of course, the magic spell that activates Tara's total craziness, and she stomping out, and he slams things around his office, and the music's getting harder, and faster, and meaner, and the night is getting darker. She held onto him like a crucifix as long as she could, but the second he got curious, she lost her gumption. Nobody ever claims to be brave, because the second you do is when they come to get you.

*"Well, congratulations. You've got it all laid out for you so you can wallow in pity for yourself. The betrayed woman, the wounded doe, with all the drivel that goes with it going through your mind right now. Oh, he doesn't love me at all, he was lying. All those lovely moments, those tender*

*words. He's lying. He's cheap and cruel... Maybe I like to be cheap once in a while. Maybe everybody does. Or don't you remember?"*

Lafayette finally finds Jason near his truck, pissing with one hand and refilling with the other. He twists him around forcefully, and starts in yelling. Jason swears he kept his mouth shut about Lafayette's supplier, but Lafayette gets in his face. "My supplier, he gone. He's fucking missing." Jason can't look him in the eye. "Other vampires find out I been selling, the same shit is gonna -- You understand it? -- The same shit is gonna happen to me." Jason grins sweetly, promising Lafayette he's got nothing to worry about. But because he can't possibly explain the rest, he just sort of assumes Lafayette will chill. But that is not what's going on. He's so angry he's grinning, like a wolf. "Bitch, you think life is just this one fucking game that you always win no matter how many dead folk are piling up around you." Jason's confused: dead folk? Hasn't it always been this way, Amy and Jason and their pet Eddie? What dead? "Maudette, Dawn..." Jason's smile falls again; that was a nightmare Amy woke him from. It persists. "Your grandma?" Lafayette shoves him down in the piss. "And I'll tell you one fucking thing: I ain't gonna be next, bitch. On my mama's grave, motherfucker. I ain't gonna be next." Jason is not irresponsible, or unkind, or childish. He's a man with a family now, and nobody even knows it. Nobody knows that he is old and wise inside, or that he's learned how to love first Amy and now Eddie, and nobody knows this because nobody can know it, because it's also kidnapping and torture, so nobody can give him credit for it, which means that the story he's telling himself, he necessarily must stand outside of it, because nobody's telling it back to him but Amy. And that gives her the upper hand. "Fuckin'..." Lafayette storms off, punching holes in car hoods and scattering beers everywhere; Jason lies in the mud and tries to locate that feeling again.

-- Page 22 --

They back up another old car in the fog and the Magister reviews Bill's life. "You have no nest. You prefer to consort with humans. You seem to have lost all sense of our priorities." All around them stands their family assembled, looking at his betrayal and his unmutuality and the way it indict them, and they shake their heads. "William Compton, you owe us. A life." At the Magister's tiny nod, Luisa opens the trunk of the car, and a young redheaded girl falls out onto the paving, scared, running to them for help and getting pushed back into the circle like a nightmare moshpit as they laugh at her screams and whimpers. Luisa throws her down, on her face, and Pam steps to the front of the crowd, fangs out. Jessica shivers on the ground, terrified and praying, and Bill protests. "Oh, precious Jesus, God, save me, save me. Make it all a dream..." She doesn't wake, they keep laughing. Bill pleads with the Magister to put him in the coffin instead, and the Magister smiles. Jessica crawls to him, on his tawdry throne, one fingertip at a time, pleading for his help. "Please, it's the first time I ever snuck out. I just wanted to go to Ashley's party." Bill is sickened, watching her beg. "I only ever get to go to youth choir and prayer group. If you take me home, I won't say a word to Mama and Daddy, or anybody... Please, please, sir, please help me." It's so embarrassing, but it makes sense: she was taught to follow the alpha's lead, and the Magister's the oldest and the strongest and the wisest and he sits on a throne. I don't think she's abnormally religious, I don't think her parents kept her locked up or anything like that: I think she's a normal, lovely, sheltered girl. The Magister loves that best. She falls on her face and he points her to Bill: "Meet your Maker." Jessica turns and climbs toward him, scuttling, staring up into his eyes. "Please don't let them kill me. Please." Bill swallows. It's the worst thing she can think of, but it's not the worst thing. "I don't wanna die."

The last victim of Jonathan Shields is a writer; his novel becomes a screenplay only after Jonathan steals his wife away so that he can work, undistracted. The novel is a testament to her, and we see the wheels within the wheels: he creates her as a novel, only to be destroyed by the reality. I mention this because creating women in our own image is something that all men are taught and few men refuse, and because this was the novel's jacket blurb: *A sensitive, unforgettable portrait of a present-day Southern belle: gay and foolish, naive, shrewd and heart-breaking all at once.* I miss Sookie too.

-- Page 23 --

Arlene asks after Sam, and Sookie offers to get some ice: "I could use a break from all this anyhow," she says and stomps away; Arlene is totally offended, hitching up her dress and wandering away: "Well, thanks for having such a great time at my party!" Sookie heads inside and fills the bucket, and just as she's reaching for the second one, the lights go out. Not the electricity -- there's still the quiet hum of the cooler, and all the neon signs are bright -- but the lights themselves. She stares around for a bit, feeling for him with her mind, and the first thought she sees is a woman: young, beautiful, choking to death on a bathroom floor with his hands around her throat. Sookie drops to the floor and there's a long chase around all of Merlotte's, jumping over things and turning over huge metal racks in his way, a chase around a stainless work table that reminded everybody of *Jurassic Park*, taking off her shoes in the dark, various horror movie tropes and shadows. She sees the memory again: a girl named Cindy, betrayed and dying, all alone, just a girl, sliding down the wall.

*Now, what'll we put on the screen that'll make the backs of their necks crawl?  
A bird, its neck broken, feathers torn from its throat.*

She kicks him, hard, and jumps through the kitchen window, out into the bar -- and runs into Sam at the door. She doesn't even see him as she gasps and moans and struggles, eyes blind, mutely struggling like a deer caught in wire, or a frightened bird. He calls her back to herself, and she tells him the Killer is there, inside, stalking her again. He makes to investigate, but she's an octopus of terror, grabbing desperately at him, begging him not to leave her alone, not to go, not to risk her. He wraps her in his arms and lets her weep and shake, and the Killer escapes.

Georgia couldn't even see straight, she was crying so hard. She got in her car and sped away from that house, from the scandalous whore and all the pain she represented, all that history of cheapness and self-destruction she thought she'd exorcised. It was raining. The last time she tried to kill herself it was a different girl. That was before the parties and the glory; that was a girl who had not yet been saved.

Tara's crying so hard and so desperately it sounds like screaming, her childish clown makeup running down her face, hair disheveled; she raises a plastic bottle of vodka to her mouth and sucks it down. Snake juice, for a mad girl. If she'd danced with the demon she could be free, and now it rides upon her back. She could have made peace with the pieces of herself, but chose to bury them instead. You forget to pray for the angel and then get angry when the angels don't pray for us, as though that's fair. As though you're allowed to forget your soul and the wonders inside it, until you get selfish and curious on your own timetable. She could have laughed, and really laughed with joy when she was happy, and cried when she was sad, and laughed about it again after that. She could have lived out a life as it was intended: one step at a time. But Tara's too smart for that; Tara deserves magic. And when

she found out that crooked witches in crooked houses in the forest don't exist, she was disgusted. Where was the real magic? It felt like magic. Smelled like it, tasted like it. But in the sunlight it was all a mistake, a fake, a terrible betrayal. She wanted real magic, because she has no idea what that is. The madness and the wildness of real magic, Herne and Dionysus, the night that made you: true magic is abandon.

-- Page 24 --

*Now, what'll we put on the screen that'll make the backs of their necks crawl?  
A little girl screaming, claw marks down her cheeks.*

Tara takes a pull off her bottle and when she looks up, there's a woman in the road. She is naked, long matted hair covering her breasts. Beside her stands a feral razorback boar, here at the crossroads, her legs thick as trees or a cloven-hooved devil's. "What the fuck?!" Tara screams, driving into the face of madness, and swerves, knocking herself out as she blasts up against a tree. The woman whirls to watch her as the smoke comes up from her hood, and turns away again smirking, naked, covered in dirt -- but with a nice smoky eye! -- and leads the boar toward Bon Temps, away from the crossroads, called down into the world by desperation and fear. You wanted real magic? Wild magic? Welcome to the world of trouble. You're soaking in it.

"Look," Amy pushes at Jason as they make their way down the stairs, "If you wanted to feed him, we should've talked about it first." Jason's who is bound and determined to get the upper hand no matter how many people, starting with him, end up dead: "I don't need your fucking permission!" Amy asks him how they can expect Eddie to trust them, if they don't even trust each other. Eddie groans as they flip the lights on, still fighting. "This ain't a game, *woman*. I don't want him ending up dead!" Amy code-switches again, claiming that Eddie's going to kill them. Jason promises her he won't, and kisses her -- then shoves her across the room. And it's done. Amy Burley is a person that a lot of bad things have happened to, and Amy Burley is a person who destroys any world that doesn't agree with her. "I'm gonna let him go, and don't even try to fucking stop me." Eddie calls out weakly to Jason, his friend, the boy who loves him, and Jason shoves Amy away again, working at his bounds while Eddie begs. "Yeah, I'm coming. I'm coming. Don't tell me what I can and can't..." Without standing, Amy grabs the first thing close to hand -- a fence picket, not yet painted white, the first tools of a life they won't let her have no matter how hard she tries or how good she is -- and stakes him. Jason screams and tries to stop her, but too late. His face contorts in sadness and rage and fear and disgust as he rips at the pieces of Eddie all over him, desperate to get away, clawing at himself, trying to get out of his skin, sick and heartbroken and shocked.

"If you wanna torture anyone, torture me!" Bill cries, and the Magister's offended. This isn't torture, it's birth. Bill's about to become a father, with his family to watch. How dare you call this torture? "I could show you torture if you like," the Magister offers, as Jessica prays and slowly goes insane. "No, I was... I was wrong to speak." The Magister tells him to knock off the stalling, and reminds him, as Amy reminded Jason at that first picnic, when even the leaves were so in love they tickled and kissed each other in the sunlight, "What you see in this cow, Mr. Compton, is merely a response to stimuli. Humans are quite... Primitive. Incapable of feeling pain as we do." Which is so much more than a parallel to Amy, or any historical horrors: it recapitulates the very first lie we're ever told. A separation between us and the rest of the world means subjective importance and reality. Becoming adult,

becoming human, is remembering your ability to feel the pain and experience, or at least take on faith, the subjective experience of everyone else.

-- Page 25 --

Luisa drags Jessica to Bill as she's singing out the Lord's Prayer, forgetting vital parts, guilty with the possibility that forgetting a few words of a prayer might make the difference between life and death. The Magister checks his Blackberry, and I do have to mention: what, they just had this girl in a trunk just in case? Or was she going to be the after-Tribunal dinner mint, or what? "According to our records, you've never been a Maker, is that right?" Yes. "But you know the procedure?" Jessica weeps, abject. "Then proceed." And the family looks on, smiling with pride, and love. She whimpers on the ground, tracing little circles and praying to them. Everybody's fangs are out, tumescent. Vampires are sex plus death, and this is how they reproduce. No wonder they don't know the difference between sex and violence. There's a sentimentality in their eyes, warring with their lust; her cries are exquisite.

Minnelli, Hitchcock, Huston, Barrymore, they all had something in common with Jonathan Shields: they were producers, creators, so in love with the goddess in their woman that they could never find the woman in there. They dressed them up, or turned them into other women from before; they changed them, and in so doing changed themselves. Men have been doing this as long as there have been men. They were collectors and they wrote their women into stories they made up themselves, they were authors and they were Makers. They were vampires.

Bill takes her hand and she stirs, looking up into his eyes. Two eyes, shining in the darkness. "Are you a Christian?" she asks, because there are two kinds of people. "I was," he answers honestly and without thinking. "I'm a good girl," she assures him, still confused but past worrying at it. "Jesus will take me home to Heaven." Bill smiles sadly, because that's the one thing that's not true anymore; he asks her her name and begins the glamour. "You're safe now. Look in my eyes." He caresses her face and she gazes on the infinite love in him, the divine kindness looking back out at her. "Everything will be fine..." The Magister interrupts, to remind him glamour's not permitted here, and he breaks the contact. She falls out of Heaven once again, and into hell. "She's just a girl," Bill protests, and the Magister yells at him to back his shit up some more and stop being boring. And to the hungry grunts and orgasmic groans of his family, as the sway and clutch at each other, eyes locked on the proceedings, he takes her, begging for forgiveness, and screams. It is hungry and it is sad; it's sex and death. Pam and Eric are hypnotized: It's a family, being born. He sings the night that made him, and all the infinite nights that follow, and then he takes her life. Jessica dies. And Jessica is born: created and destroyed.

## WEREWOLF VS. VAMPIRE VS. SOMEBODY WE FORGOT TO BE

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 11 | Aired on 11.16.2008

*To Love Is To Bury* - Tara leaves jail in the arms of a brand new kind of crazy, Sam and Sookie get a little closer, Bill is exhausted by parenthood, and even Jason thinks he's the Killer.

Jason and Amy clean up the pieces of Eddie, and while at first he's strong enough to throw out all the V, eventually she sneaks a little bit back into their bed. While they're tripping balls, Rene sneaks into Jason's house and finally strangles Amy. This is kind of the final proof necessary for Jason to admit he's possibly the killer, and he willingly goes into lockup. Also in jail: Tara Mae Thornton, on a DUI that can't be explained by mythical naked ladies and giant pigs. There's a fairly brutal scene in which Lettie Mae basically disowns Tara because she feels like her salvation is endangered, and then Naked Lady shows up in the form of a freelance social worker, pays Tara's bail, and takes her home with her in a shiny magical car. And finally, Lafayette threatens the state senator's run for the US Congress when he sees his former lover talking shit about vampires and homos on the campaign trail, which should work out splendidly.

Sookie and Sam make temporary house together after she decides if being chased down by the Killer in her place of employment didn't activate her blood bond with Bill, he can just go to hell. They investigate the girl she saw being killed in the Killer's head, and meet a funny old man who tells them the waitress's brother/killer was Drew Marshall -- now living under a fake name with a ridiculous Cajun accent in Renard Parish and newly engaged. That's right: Rene is the strangler. But Sookie and Sam don't know that, thanks to the usual farcical miscommunications, and end up mugging down right as Bill's coming home. He jumps Sam, and Sookie gets pissed enough to rescind his invitation into her home, which bums him out because of how he just killed a girl for her, and also didn't even get to tell her about his new daughter.

Bill's vampire daughter Jessica is *truly* outrageous, what with her insane hunger for human blood, absurdly delightful existential crisis, generally teenaged acting out, and all of it. Her main goals seem to be: saying curse words, killing a bunch of people, and becoming a stripper. Mostly, it's awesome because of the intensely hilarious situations it puts Bill into, which are nonstop, blackly comedic, and include a vampire parenting sequence with Eric that's gayer than the time Angel and Spike did it.

Next week: the first season finale, Lafayette gets into some scrapes, we learn more about Naked Pig Lady Maryann, Jason is approached by the Newlin vamp-hating church, and Rene comes for Sookie yet again -- but meets a pissed-off border collie in the process.

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Pam watches Bill digging Jessica's grave for awhile, but eventually gets bored and starts checking out the body's tits and ass, pulling up her dress to look at her panties. Bill is totally offended, but Pam just sighs. "It's your own fault. You and your insane affection for stupid cattle." She's still wearing her sunglasses on her head; every day is Halloween. He tells her to go away and she says she's there on Magister's orders. "I fulfilled the conditions of my sentence! I murdered this innocent girl!" Pam totally scoffs at him, because once

somebody's decided to hate themselves you can't really argue with it. "There was no murder. You drained her blood and gave her yours." He says however you say it, that's proof of his loyalty, but she's still not leaving: he's romantic and sentimental and kind of a dumbass, and who knows what he'll do rather than letting Jessica be born. "You just might do something to keep the little blood bag from joining our ranks. I'll follow my orders; I won't let you stake her before she goes to ground." He drops the shovel and stares at her, promising he's not going to stake her: "I'm gonna set her free," he says, and his face goes unsure. Is that something Pam needs to know? Is that something she can even understand? She loves being a vampire. Her story started there.

Lorena turned Bill as a reward for his gentility. If anyone's spirit deserves to stay in the world eternally, it's a gentleman. The fact that he was seriously traumatized by it isn't his fault, but the fact that centuries later he's still whining about it is most certainly his fault. So this is his worst nightmare coming true: taking possession of somebody else's choices. Killing a girl to save her from torture. She went looking for danger, and she found it. Jessica's parents were trying to keep her safe, her body and her soul safe, but she knew she knew better than them. She knew she was risking her safety, and she was right. We don't always choose the things that happen to us, but we always choose how we respond.

So now Jessica is dead, because Bill killed her. And whatever happens next is up to her. And if he doesn't agree with it, that's on him, because the time for him taking her choices away is over. And if he could see that for one second -- that Jessica's story belongs to Jessica now, that she's the main character in it, that it's not about self-loathing or self-hatred or self-denial unless she chooses that -- then Lorena could never hurt him again.

-- Page 2 --

"You've *already* set her free. The same as Eric freed me." Bill tells Jessica's story, but it is not Jessica's story, and Bill will never understand that other people have their own stories, because his pain is too large to look over: "Everyone she's ever known will recoil from her. Everything she's ever loved has been stolen from her." Pam refuses to call her by name, because she's dead, "a pathetic lump of temporary flesh," and Bill hates it, but Pam's right. Because in Pam's story, before Jessica was dead, she was even less alive than she is now. I'm on Pam's side, because the thing has happened. Jessica died. And we choose how we respond to that.

"[You've given her] the ultimate gift! You're a Maker! You're a *hero*." It rakes across Bill's skin, the joy she takes in this. In a new life, being born to power and untold beauty and strength; he's brought another of God's creatures into the world. He says it to wound: "I find myself doubting whether you were ever truly human." And Pam delights in it, thanking him, kicking the corpse into its hole. He hops in with it, whining, and Pam shovels dirt over them; he curls around the body like a mother, like the tender seed inside the loam, waiting for some earthly magic to kick in and bring it to life. "I'll tuck you in. Tomorrow night, your little girl will rise. Vampire."

Sam puts a shotgun shell on Sookie's mantle downstairs, leaving yet another message for Tara (Her awesome outgoing: "This is Tara. Leave a message. Easy stuff.") and wondering if she's in a ditch somewhere, then apologizing for the thought. Sookie brings down linens, so that he can sleep in the house and protect her, like Bill asked. And, as it turns out, was necessary. "I just had to put those clothes in the wash. Felt like the killer was... all over me. Watching me, hating me, itching for a... knife, or a rope or... my neck." She shudders and

Sam asks if she picked up anything else; his thoughts were "all red and black and... snarly," she says, the questioning lilt in her voice as she tries not for the first time to put her gift into words. The thing before words, that's what she hears, and putting it into words is as hard for her as it is for us.

There was something familiar about the Killer, that's for sure, but still not recognizable. Sam suggests again that they go to the police, and Sookie laughs. "Sheriff Dearborn, Andy Bellefleur, I saw a woman die. I just happened to be in somebody else's brain at the time." She was young, and pretty; she wore an apron -- "Like a mom?" he asks, still lonely and still young -- like a waitress. "Was there a name tag?" she asks herself, and shakes her head sadly: "I don't know. I was looking at her eyes. She was so surprised..." The people that trust you, the people you invite in, those are the people that can hurt you the most. That's what trust means: It's natural to hate the people you love most because you're giving them the most of yourself, and the fact that we don't, or that it's rare as it is, is one of the things that should make you proud to be human.

-- Page 3 --

"Well," he says regretfully, "Do you want to call Bill? I mean, it might make you feel better..." Sookie shakes her head, because she's come to rely on the blood bond and she knows what it means: "He would found how scared I was, he would've known I was in danger. If he didn't show up tonight, he's not coming back." Sam strokes her hair a little bit and they sort of vacantly stare into each other's eyes because they have had a very long day, and she pulls it together enough to ask about Tara. He, of course, has not -- although it would be a tremendous show of trust if she'd call him from the next scene, wouldn't it? -- and Sookie takes a while to stare into space about that too, and then she randomly splits upstairs, leaving him alone to cock his gun wistfully.

Very, very drunk Tara stands against a cop car talking to her old friend Deputy Kenya, who's not buying her story about Naked Pig Lady. "Standing there naked, fucking with my head! [With] like a crazy-ass motherfucking Paul Bunyan pig!" Awesome, but not as awesome as this line, in both concept and execution: "Kenya, I am an excellent driver. But you cannot prepare for a naked lady, and a hog, in the middle of the road. Now you *know* that." Kenya also puts Tara's drunk ass in the column of knowns, which incites Tara to much disbelieving insult, so Kenya finally gives her a sobriety test, or more like the overture of a sobriety test which includes in itself enough evidence the other way to contain its own destruction, and finally throttled by Tara's total drunkenness, insane outfit and hair and makeup, on top of the generally offputting Tara behavior, Kenya yells, "What is the matter with you? You're turning into Lettie Mae!" Which, of course, earns her a big old FU from Tara, and a short time later Tara's knocking her head against the door frame of the cop car while yelling, "But the lady! And the pig!"

Jason's not dealing incredibly well with being covered in Eddie blood and that weird fettuccini grue that comes from staking a vampire, plus the fact that he just saw his girlfriend kill a dude after spending most of the day ethically signing off Jason's responsibility for that selfsame dude's kidnap and torture, so now she's gotta explain the entire world to him again for like the fifth day in a row, and until she does he won't have peace, because he loved a man and that man is dead. They exposit the highlights: Jason, high on Eddie's special brand of careful affection and Hoyt and Rene's prodding of his own masculinity and self-determination, decided to test the limits of his relationship with/control by Amy Burley by letting Eddie go; Amy, afraid of letting Jason learn the truth

-- that her words aren't spells that spell the world, but justifications for things she feels like doing -- and afraid she was right -- that Eddie really would have killed them both -- and most of all afraid that the entire world she's spent days and weeks building around herself would come crashing down again by a sudden jump by the fulcrum point, the pivot, the anchor in the middle of the map, Jason, sending them both into the abyss, killed Eddie. A sacrifice of blood to tie them together forever.

-- Page 4 --

"I told you not to talk to him. He was controlling your mind..." Jason's pissed, because he knows Eddie doesn't know how to do that yet; that Eddie's so young he's got no guile in him at all, that Eddie's so soft he could barely bite, that he had tamed the beast in Eddie and that they trusted one another; that they had no guile in them and didn't know yet how to lie. That there was something old, and good, and wise, something extraordinary, in Eddie, and that he could see it, and that they could see each other, and that he knew it would be all right. "God, it was never gonna be all right. From the minute we took him, you knew it was gonna end like this, you just couldn't face it." Jason assures her he had no idea it would end with him covered in the blood and skin of a person he loved, and she rewrites the world again, in cinder and soot and blood and skin: "You wanted his blood. Bad. You were with me the whole way, so do not act like this is my fault. Now, I said to clean up, so clean up!" She shoves a towel at him and they scream: "Yankee bitch!" "Dumb fucking hillbilly!" They try to clean their mess up; it's a good five seconds before he starts to vomit.

"It's okay. It's gonna be all right. We just gotta keep our shit together." Just like they killed a man; it looks and feels and sounds like they just killed a man. "For the last time: he was already dead, he was not a man. He was a predator, only we got him first." She walks him out of it; lets him lean against her with arm thrown across her shoulder as she walks him out of it, humbled and hopping: "Don't do this, okay? Don't let a vampire come between us. Because what we have..." She says his name, sharply, to draw him back in, to pull his eyes to her beautiful face. Eddie couldn't do this yet; he was too young. They are covered in blood, and hunger, and hate, and fear and lust and selfishness, they are covered in murder and gore and the horror of a life they ended together: "It's beautiful."

It's morning time, by which I mean the sun is coming up. Sookie's sitting at the kitchen table, by which I mean it's breakfast time. There are eggs and sausage in the oven, staying warm for Sam: in the daytime, when the sun comes up, and families eat breakfast together, Sookie's sitting at the kitchen table with the home smells of egg and sausage heading up the stairs and out into the sunlight. It's going to be clear all day, and you can walk out into the sunshine of a morning, after breakfast with the family, and know that everything is going to be all right: that a new day is beginning. If you're alive, you can do those things.

-- Page 5 --

I think there are two main reasons our entire pop culture at the moment is consumed by vampire boyfriend/werewolf boyfriend. The first is that we're only afraid of three things -- sex, death and life -- and we'll do anything with our imaginations to cross from here to there to feel safer around them. Vampires = sex + death (an end to a start, the joy in being consumed utterly, burned alive; to be awake when the world is sleeping and thus asleep when the world is awake; to be dead to the world) and werewolf guys = sex + life (overly lush, too accepting, too much like life on V, fucking in the garbage and the sunlight).

The second one, though, and it's kind of central to this episode, has to do with feminism, particularly our generation's bizarre experience of feminism as culture speeds up. Vampires, in this particular brand of literature, are paternalistic/"protective," seductive/"mind-controlling," bad boys-except-with-you types; like keeping a tiger in the kitchen, or Tank Girl, they're the giant scary thing that loves only you and can kill everyone else. And then there's the werewolf guy, who just wants to romp around all romantical and dedicate himself to you utterly and says "More life! More sex! More fun! Love who you are! Get lost in it!"

And for those of us who make a habit of sleeping with men, these are the ways we're trained to respond to men: as cold and controlling authorities by virtue of their physical power, or as exuberantly terrifying, conspiratorial beasts lacking any sort of self-control. Vampires are nice because they are courtly, and old in the ways that count while being forever young and hot in the ways that *really* count, and rich, and do things like come zoom-running from miles away and holler about how *you must be protected* and stand outside your house all night, staring. Vampire guy can *make* you be turned on, so he removes any kind of sexual risk or shame; you never have to ask for it and if you do it's because he made you want it; all you have to do is lie there and be penetrated. The downside is, they never ever go away.

Werewolf guy is nice because he says, "If it feels good, do it!" Be super psychic, yell at Andy Bellefleur, make out when you wanna make out. Werewolf can guy can *smell* that you're turned on, so you don't ever have to admit it: he carries the sex monster for both of you. Werewolf guy knows better than you about the beast, because you've never been allowed to let your beast free. So he urges you to do so, and shows you how to do so, and it's very fun and not very memorable because we don't live in memory, we live now. He changes shape to be something closer to what you wanted, what you thought was perfect -- the same way you change shape for vampire guy, because there are rules that must be followed. Vampire rules are the rules of the world and of the night, Saturnian and Jovian, hard and fast; werewolf guy rules are the rules of the heart. Downside is, they go away. Werewolf guy is just as fickle as you are, or would be if "fickle" were a word that applied to men, because werewolf guy is a horndog, who loves you eternally until he turns his head or else can eternally love any number of people in this world -- which contrasts absolutely with the singlemindedness of vampire guy, who's crossed *oceans of time*, who's been waiting... Oh, just *hundreds* of years for somebody *just like you*. Vampire guy conspires with time itself.

-- Page 6 --

So you're a girl, or a boy, and the world keeps throwing guys at you, and some of them are like *this* and some of them are like *that*, and every time you're thinking: Is he the one? The one I would actually change things around for? Or is the one to romp around with? The entire universe works on the twinned principles of compression and inflation, repression and abandon, structure and chaos, endings and beginnings. It's not about making the choice between vampire guy and werewolf guy, it's about the fact that these are the only two ways we know how to deal with men, because we were born at a particularly effed-up time where our mothers' feminist ideals are flexing and bending to the breaking point and we're not seeing our mothers walk the walk. Because their dogma was invented by them, as received wisdom, in the decades surrounding our birth, we watched it fall apart around them. Our hearts broke together, ours and our mothers, when we found out how the world really worked.

The original vanguard said, "Stop locking us up at night. Let us go out into the world and see what we must see, and do what we must do. We can and will protect ourselves, but we'll never know for sure until you stop treating us like girls and start understanding that we are women, which is the same thing as being a person." They were werewolf days and howling nights, women shapeshifting before each other's eyes, exploring what they could be with and for men and what they could be with and for each other. For the first time since like agrarian times, women assumed shared control of the cultural narrative: Carole King writes "He Hit Me (It Felt Like A Kiss)" in the Brill Building in 1962, and nobody actually gets it. The days and nights of the counterculture are chronicled by men who write like women and women who write like men. Bodies are redefined and rewritten, what they mean and to whom they belong, new ways and laws are created, men and women bleed into each other, exchanging secrets and telling stories and realizing that 90% of boy-girl bullshit is just an illusion handed down from the people before.

Fast-forward to the '90s, and you've got "may I touch your left breast" at Dartmouth; "sexual harassment" being applied to literally every circumstance possible; diluting and obscuring its own once-valid complaint; girls of my generation saying, " Fucking *lock me up*. This world is scary, sex is scary and my safety is an illusion, pornography is violence, sex is evil, I get it now, I repent, I'm sorry for questioning the patriarchy, please give me my bra back." Our culture was invaded by forces from beyond the pale, by diseases so powerful they seemed magical, and we worshipped at their shrine in a way: by becoming ever more obsessed with blood, with sex, with death, with taint, equating blood and sex and death into a single objective correlative for the fact that sex is scary, always, and somehow we forgot that for just long enough to fall in love with the idea of being scared of sex itself. Gay sex, which is like scary with a little scary on top anyway, intersected with this stuff in a remarkably unlucky way; our vampires went bisexual as a result. Vampire nights and the rotting carpet of a culture in decline, obsessed with its own decay and dancing to goth music in the last big vampire fad, calling every day Halloween and calling for the death of sex itself in reaction to the sterility and the fear and the desperate need for somebody, anybody, to explain what the fuck was going on.

-- Page 7 --

The literature here deals with this dichotomy -- how you deal with the darker sides of masculinity in the post-Bly post-'90s sexual anarchy we've wandered into -- in different ways. Those Anita Blake books deal with it by turning the woman into a third, inherently feminine creature of darkness, a succubus, equal in power to the two operating male archetypes. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* books get really weird with it pretty early on, but basically frame the werewolf/vampire triangle as a basic coming-of-age story in which both versions of masculinity are necessary in order to fully awaken the woman's sexual maturity, flowing into and out of each other and breaking down the walls between them even as she's taking on the roles and habits of everybody else, like every teenager. Harris, in the source material, works the triangle as a negotiation with darkness, making both suitors passports into the areas of darkness necessary to reclaim all territory, dark and light, for herself. To me, this seems healthiest, but they're all the same kind of myth.

Why's it happening again? Why on earth is our culture playing out entirely vampire boyfriend/werewolf boyfriend right now? And I'm not just saying this because *Twilight* came out yesterday -- these three series of books I'm talking about started in 1993 (*Anita*), 2001 (*Sookie*), and 2005 (*Twilight*) and pretty much have ruled the bestseller lists since then, even with the variances in quality, readability and WTF between them; seven of the eight

Sookie novels are bestsellers pretty much nonstop, which is not something that ever happened before. I think it's pretty easy if you follow the line of blood: The war and the Greatest Generation's reassignment and recapitulation of gender roles becomes the uphill battle of the '50s and the glorious global shout of the '60s becomes the delirious sexual abandon of the '70s becomes the cruelty and sexual artifice of the '80s becomes the total AIDS-related sexual freakout of the '90s ... and we grew up in that, doing the incredibly dangerous undercover work of becoming healthy sexual beings that people have been doing since there were people, with *all that crazy on top*, mediated for the first time by television telling us back to ourselves in realtime and the endless fucking Baby Boomer retellings and nostalgia and music videos disguised as feature films. We became men and women in the middle of that shitstorm. Vampire Guy/Werewolf Guy is just us telling that story back to the world and trying to decide what to do next.

-- Page 8 --

Do you want to be married, do you want to enter into a static world where the choices have been made and the growing has been done and the living can start? Does a part of you get off on the idea of being a good wife, of being in control of yourself and your home to such a degree that the balance of power in the house can shift around whenever you feel like it? Do you want to be tied up in the darkness, arms around you as tight as death's, and know that you are finally safe? To love is to bury, do you want to be buried? Half the time. Exactly half the time.

Do you want to be just like a man? Roaming the night, fucking at will, being open and honest, without any ties at all? Do you want to escape the tyranny of relationships and demands and live on your own, like a beast, plant a garden and watch it grow, feed the cat, sleep with just everybody in the whole world? Do you want to try fucked up sex things that maybe you can't look the person in the eye for awhile, but you can laugh about it eventually? Would you like to live in a world where nobody judges you or says that words reserved for women who make their own choices? Wouldn't you love, for once, to make the call and honestly know there are no social repercussions, no psychological tell, no evidence of past trauma, or tiny little shame in the back corner? To love is to be taken apart and put back together better, do you want to be ripped apart? Half the time.

Because, you know, those are the only things you're allowed to want. Men that act like fathers, men that act like brothers. There are no other men in this world, we've been told our entire lives; men are objects to be feared, and they are objects you put into your life for certain reasons and to have certain effects. Vampires don't have souls. Werewolf guy has a soul but it doesn't even make sense and it has ADD anyway. And there you are, this rational boy or girl, confronted with their beautiful faces and fucked-up rationales, having to make a choice about what you're going to put in your life, and why. And that's not optimal -- because people all have the gift of subjectivity no matter how you treat them -- but it's a hell of a lot better to know you have options (including getting over this dichotomy altogether) and it's comforting to know that the entire publishing economy, in a very real way, right now rests on the idea of our culture collaboratively trying to process this vampire guy/werewolf guy phenomenon so we can move on to whatever the next (even more WTF) thing will be.

-- Page 9 --

(I'm going to say that whatever it is, the male Quest of Harry Potter is going to swing into alignment with the female concerns of VG/WWG, and what you'll be seeing in the next decade is going to be hero stories about girls, specifically instead of having these arbitrary Team Edward/Team Jacob blockheaded icons thrown in her path, more like Sookie than anything else, where the obstacles are mostly the girl's own bullshit rather than the freeform hysterical derangement about relationships that has come to characterize popular literature from chick lit to [S&TC](#) to *He's Just Not That Into You*, which gigantic chunk of our cultural landscape right now, when considered from the outside, looks screaming-meemie amounts of crazy. The regrettable thing about the post-ironic cycle we're about to hit is that self-obsession is the price you pay for earnestness, so, paradoxically you get more done for other people by focusing your hard work on yourself, unless you're doing it as a way around *actually* focusing on yourself. Which is inevitably what will happen, and then we'll all have to look around for a new way to fix ourselves/go crazy.) I guess it just comes down to the fact you're either loved or your forgotten, and this mad dash to be on the list of people who are loved is responsible for really bad judgment calls. To love is to raise, up into heaven; but to love is also to bury.

Which is a digression on a scale I don't even think I have ever attempted, but Sookie really seems to be confusing for a lot of viewers and I wanted to get that whole dichotomy out there. Breakfast, here and now, is from Adele's recipe. She cooked it for the man who stayed, and he just happens to be the man who can eat it, here in the morning, without bursting into flame. A whole life spent waiting for the story to start, for a man to love her without all the creepy stuff that goes along with it; a whole life waiting for sex without pain, for danger without terror, for beauty. Oh, to be normal, to be loved and normal and known as one of the ones who won, who wasn't alone. And the world keeps putting it in her grasp and pulling it away again. But when Sam walks out into the kitchen, putting on his T-shirt and looking at her with that smile, eating the breakfast she made for him, here in the sunlight, and teases her into eating it with him, that's a new offer from the universe: "You can have love without complications."

-- Page 10 --

"I'll tell you what, I am sick and tired of waiting around to get strangled," Sookie says, and he says he'll protect her but she knows he can't stay with her 24 hours a day for the rest of her life but they both know better: he surely can. He would love that more than anything, and so would she, and they'll have breakfast every morning in the sunlight and go around town a couple, the well-to-do bar owner and his once-troubled, now-adored wife: love without complication, love as the antidote to complication. It seems so simple here in the kitchen: Bill is complications on a vast and shallow level. The sex, the blood, the feeling of safety and always being protected were a compensation for the million miles of bullshit fangbangers slog through every day, not that she is one but still: worth it. And if Vampire Guy doesn't protect you -- if he runs away like some kind of Werewolf Guy and won't even tell you why, or let you rise to the occasion and help, because it's a Vampire Thing and you just don't get it, it's not your business, you can't crawl into each other's lives and social circles any more than you'll ever sleep in each other's arms, anymore than you'll ever have breakfast together, or children, or get married if the VRA doesn't pass, any more than you have a future with a dead thing...

Then the universe is saying, "Love or no love, this is a losing game. You wouldn't let your friend date an addict, and this is even more annoyingly complex," and the universe is saying, "Look, Bill agreed with me, and traded himself out for Sam. Literally said

Sam is going to be me until I get back." And you know what? Sam is -- now that he's a shapeshifter, now that he's special like Sookie, now that she's not alone and he thinks her gift is wonderful -- pretty much like a better sort of Bill, right now. Once Bill comes back, if he comes back, she knows she'll be swept up again and all the darkness and the blood comes rushing, and the questions without answers one way or the other, and the biting and the fucking and the way everybody looks at you, all the things you give up to be with him.... But until then, how nice is it to sit at the breakfast table in Gran's house and eat breakfast with an uncomplicated man, to tell jokes and solve mysteries and crimes and go out among the humans in the sunlight, ask questions that *do* have answers, and *get* those answers, and save *your own* life while Bill is traipsing around playing Tribunal and refusing to help you, when that was the one greatest thing about loving him.

-- Page 11 --

"So you're looking up killers in the Yellow Pages?" Sookie laughs and explains that she remembered part of the Killer's memory about the girl, her name Cindy and her name tag, which Sam recognizes as being a pie house a couple hours away. "You don't have to come with me," Sookie says after a grin, and Sam shakes his head: of course he does. "Come on. Eat up, you need fuel. Don't sass me." Sookie yells that he's not the boss of her, then they laugh: he is the boss of her. Would be creepy if it weren't cute, and if he had any authority whatsoever.

Amy's shoving bits of Eddie down the disposal, wearing rubber gloves, when Jason comes out dressed for road crew. In the next scene we'll see Rene and Hoyt: T-shirts regulation, safety vests; Jason's sleeves are cut off and there's a deep notch in the neck. Jason is *sooo* awesome. Amy chats at him nervously, but jumps when he sweeps all the vials of Eddie's blood out of the fridge and into a garbage bag, slamming it against the floor. V gives you a heart, opens doors you never knew existed; the price of having a heart and doors is that pain comes in and breaks you, and Jason can dimly remember a time when the world wasn't so good at hurting him, breaking his heart, and he's not wrong that it's the V doing that. It's the V doing that. It's the only good thing that comes of V-juice, that momentary and ephemeral feeling of connection, that reminder that God is implicit in every word and action. No thank you. She tries to apologize about Eddie, but he's going into the trash bag too, along with the memory of hope, along with Adele and Sookie: "We are done with this shit, do you hear me? Done. I want every fucking drop out of my house and if you don't like it, you can pack your goddamn bags and go." He storms out and Amy nearly weeps, alone: "...Love you."

Lafayette's happy at first to see his state Senator boyfriend David "Duke" Finch on the TV at Merlotte's, but once he hears Finch's plans (US House) and platform ("Equal rights for vampires? I don't think so. Many of them are foreign immigrants... Taking our jobs and our women. And their very blood turns our children into addicts, drug dealers and homosexuals. No vampire, and none of these vampire-loving deviants, deserve any rights at all") sends him into a tizz, throwing food at the TV and screaming at him for his lies. He asks if Terry heard any of that, and he shakes his head matter-of-factly: "I can't listen to politicians no more, I get a seizure." Terry begs him to change the channel to "[his] home decor program," and Lafayette obliges, just as Amy's coming in looking fucked up, like she just killed a guy. "Oh darling, you looking a little used up." She grins a hello, as taken with Lafayette as everyone else on earth. "Jason dragging you into his bullshit?" She pulls off a glass full of Coke from the bar taps -- would that be ORGANIC COCA-COLA, ASSHOLE? -- and tells him she has no idea what he means. What he means, of course, is V addiction, not

kidnapping or murder. "Why is everybody tellin' me lies today?" he asks Terry, who's moderately sympathetic: "Got no idea. Look at that, Lafayette! Theme shelves." Lafayette nods, because Finch will be shaking hands in Monroe tonight, and that's the last thing the TV said. "Oh that's pretty, baby. ...Would you work for me tonight?" Of course he would.

-- Page 12 --

Get a load of Harley, pretty blond waitress at Miss Patty's Pie House or whatever it's called, who has never heard of Poor Dead Cindy but can name many, many pies. I guess Bon Temps is much classier than Bunkie because this girl is obviously the town retard, but it's outwith the realm of possibility that it's because she's psychic, which means our town retard totally trumps theirs. Harley's hilarious in a way I kind of understand -- back to the whole Coen Bros. disconnect again -- but I also like her because she reminds me of *Best In Show*: "No ma'am, no sir, I don't know any Cindy but I can recommend the fried apple pie, the frozen Hawaiian pie, the chocolate pecan praline pie, the chess pie, the seven-layer Jell-O pie..."

("I used to be able to name every nut that there was. And it used to drive my mother crazy, because she used to say, 'Harlan Pepper, if you don't stop naming nuts,' and the joke was that we lived in Pine Nut, and I think that's what put it in my mind, at that point. So she would hear me in the other room, and she'd just start yelling. I'd say, 'Peanut, hazelnut, cashew nut, macadamia nut...' That was the one that would send her into going crazy. She'd say, 'Would you ... stop naming nuts!' And Hubert used to be able to make the sound, he couldn't talk, but he'd go *rrrawr rrawr* and that sounded like macadamia nut. Pine nut, which is a nut but it's also the name of a town, pistachio nut, red pistachio nut, natural, all natural white pistachio nut...")

Bagger Vance orders them some pies and Harley goes, "Gotcha, Buster!" and jumps to, and he tells Sam and Sookie that Harley is so stupid they named her after a motorcycle, and also he can tell them all about Poor Dead Cindy Marshall, but first he's going to eat some pie, whatever, the facts are that she was a waitress here, and moved into Bunkie two years ago with her brother, and then a couple months after their arrival she was strangled to death, and nobody knows whodunit and nobody knows what happened to the brother: also dead? Possibly the Killer? His name was Drew Marshall. Sookie asks what Cindy was like, and Bagger Vance tells her that Cindy was "Cute as a button, a little wild, fun-loving, always nice to me. But people talked, you know... Vampers. They say she was carrying on with the vampers, I didn't believe it. What kind of woman would do such a thing?" Sookie does the third-coolest thing in the episode at this point, making a *the fuck you say* face so extreme that Sam can actually see it shining from behind her head at the counter, and puts his hand on her shoulder. And having given them the information they needed, Bagger Vance stands up babbling about pie and wanders into the next movie requiring a random old gossipy black guy, which should be coming along in five, four, three... There ya go.

-- Page 13 --

Meanwhile Tara's at the police station in that fucked up dress and her hair still all a mess, having this convo with Lettie Mae: "Mama, please don't cry. It was only a little accident and I didn't get hurt much. Well, no, I... I wasn't drunk, but they think I was. Mama, quit yelling, all I need is bail money and a ride home, there's no reason to cry..."

Jason begs and begs for Hoyt and Rene to spend time with him tonight so that he doesn't have to deal with the situation at home. Get rid of Amy, that's provisional and something he

would never actually do, but it stays on the to-do list because it's technically possible. Go home and pretend everything's okay -- that he doesn't hate her for killing Eddie, just like Eddie said -- that's going to itch in a whole different way. Go home and stay off the V, that's going to itch worst of all, especially if she's there, looking down on his dumb ass, both cut off from the only way they can connect. Go home and she's gone, and everything falls apart. Therefore, Jason has decided without admitting it, the best option is to not go home at all, so that something else can make up his mind for him. Stay out of his house until he just has to go back, maybe with a girl in tow, and see what the world's been doing while he was out. But Rene and Hoyt won't play.

Hoyt, because he's adorably and unself-consciously excited about taking his horrible night-blind mother Maxine to a baby shower in Shreveport ("I wanna go... The food's good, the games are fun. You know, like Pass the Orange? And, if the ladies start screaming like they always do, I'll just go for a little walk.") Notably, Hoyt very clearly calls him Jay, which was previously off-limits when Jason's doors were too far open. Rene won't play along because he's taking Arlene dancing, and even though Jason begs to come along -- to be the Eddie in the basement -- Rene's not having it. Hoyt asks why he's so intent on luring them out when he's got Amy, and Jason gets sad.

"Alright, I'm gonna tell you something, but you can't say nothing to nobody. You got that? Amy likes V." They're unbelieving; Hoyt immediately tells Jason he has to help her quit; that's what love does. Rene asks if she fucks vampires too -- remember, Rene doesn't hate vampires any more than Sam does, but he sure gets weird when pretty white girls fuck them -- and Jason says, "She says she never did, but these days, it's hard to find a woman who ain't been bit." And that's how Amy Burley died.

-- Page 14 --

Hoyt asks if he loves her, and he tells the story from a third perspective, back to Jason watching Jason be Jason, doing what Jason would do if he were in the driver's seat, saying what Jason would say if he were in charge of Jason, or watching from the outside; if he were a grownup, a man, if he had the upper hand, he would do things and would have done things in precisely this way. Would never have been weak, would never have opened that first door. "I don't like this V shit. We had a terrible fight. She might be gone already and if she's not... Maybe I ought to dump her." Hoyt tells him she's a keeper, but Rene assures Jason that "These things [have] a way of working out." Jason's touched by his kindness and the careful way he says it; he has no idea it's a warning from the Bon Temps immune system saying, "You can be Jason again in just a few hours, when this problem's off your plate." Hoyt hops around giddily as they get back into their truck, and Rene wiggles eyebrows at Jason: they are men. Hoyt's just a boy.

The officer on duty at the Bunkie police station has a huge GOD HATES FANGS poster in his office, which I love but also makes it confusing for some people w/r/t the essential flexibility of the metaphors in play. The show actively resists one-to-one substitution of minority groups, precisely so that the metaphor can float, and if in one scene fangs are fags and the next second they're getting Jim Crowed, the logical jump for a newer viewer is to assign the correspondence and then get completely confused by a later shift to some other set of signifiers, which in turn makes a lot of the plot incomprehensible, like: if vampires are gays and vampires are also an evil dark cabal, then gays are an evil dark cabal, and isn't that terrible. Another sign on the wall says, "Attitudes expressed here are not necessarily those of the management."

Sookie listens to his slow, molasses thoughts about how you can't call it adultery if a wife won't have sex, but at least his mistress Debbie's a Christian. Once he gets a load of Sookie's total hotness, he's all helpful, but she flirts and plays with her hair, accidentally flashing the bite on her underarm where Bill bit her in the graveyard, and flips around immediately, good-old-boying her and stonewalling the investigation. He tells them they don't even know for sure that Drew Marshall killed his sister, and anyway it was probably a vamp, and Sookie points out that vampires don't strangle. "Well, I guess you'd know. Good riddance to white trash, that's all I got to say," he says, leering at her with the look that says a girl who lets vamps bite her is a girl who'll do things willingly that you normally have to work hard for. Sam's offended, but they are a great crimefighting duo: Sookie snaps him out of it by threatening to tell his wife about Debbie, and Sam's as amazed as ever at Sookie's full-frontal willingness to use her gift in whatever way gets the best results. They solve mysteries in the daylight, two strange creatures with powers they can use. The cop quickly switches sides again, whining that he can't just hand over a picture of Drew Marshall for them to investigate back home; he pulls the old man trick of addressing Sam entirely and forgetting Sookie altogether, offering to fax it to the police station in Bon Temps. "Fast," says Sam, and Sookie sweetly giggles: "That's all we ask. Thank you so much for your cooperation!"

-- Page 15 --

Lurlene Buttermen shakes Senator Finch's hand in Monroe, chit-chatting a moment more before Lafayette literally hip-checks her out of the way and grabs Finch's hand, pumping it slowly. "I am so happy and proud to shake the hand of someone with your values." Finch's face goes humble and cold, and Lafayette cocks his head. "Too often we're governed by criminals and hypocrites, don't you agree? But I can tell you're a man of virtues. And I applaud the effort you're making against the poor and disenfranchised, especially the vampires. And the gays." Finch tries to move him along but Lafayette pulls him closer, wearing a suit, beautifully male, jumping back and forth across the line as he does, and looks him in the eye. Eddie never learned to do this: "So many things can happen to bring down a fine personage such as yourself. You might want to be careful, you hear?" A cute camera intern tells them to look into the camera and smile -- Finch: "No. -- but it's done, the shot is taken, Lafayette slaps his ass subtly and leaves, having done a good thing and asked for his death in one breathe, and Finch, hilariously, breathes to himself, "Thanks for coming by..." So many scenes in this episode are about the conversations we keep having after the person is gone, aren't they? So much of this story is about the stuff we keep saying to people long after they've left us.

Amy's made a wonderful dinner for Jason; when he finally comes home and sees her in her lovely white dress, it all fades away. "Did you have to work late? It doesn't matter, I... I just..." He says no, straight up, that's not why he's late, and her loving smile sadly fades. "Didn't want to come home," he gruffs, and her heart breaks. "Okay," she says. Okay, this was unforgivable. She rearranged herself and her needs, threw out all the V, cooked a lovely dinner, made his house a home, and still no. Okay. "I was afraid you might've left," he says, which is one version of the truth, and Amy runs forward, stopping herself from jumping into his arms. "No, I want to be here. I want to be with you." He reiterates about the V, and she nods desperately. "I did what you said. It was all my fault, Jason. I'm so, so sorry." They make up, across a span of yards -- they touch without touching, even now. He pats his sweet belly and asks if she really made him dinner. "I'd do anything for you!" He knows it's true, his hands were covered in the proof, dripping off him like sweat. He's touched, nearly

weeping, and takes her in his arms. She says they can make it right, and he hums his assent. They will put the world back together.

-- Page 16 --

Bill sits on the stump with a four-pack of TruBlood, watches as the dirt of their shared grave begins to move. She claws her way into the moonlight, grunting as she comes; her hair is matted with dirt and her face is covered in it: his daughter being born. He stands, and she begins to scream. Unearthly, terrifying, afraid and hungry and wild. Nothing like him; there is nothing of him in her. She is beastly, feral, everything he swears he's not, mainstreaming as he tries desperately to claw his way toward redemption. His face is full of shock and barely disguised disgust as she screams; it's adorable in its shock and WTF. I love Bill Compton in this episode, for the first time, and it's because of this: he's completely out of his depth and has been from the beginning, has been in the weeds for centuries, but this is the first time his face acknowledges it, beyond a few times Sookie acted too weird to ignore. Jessica screams and screams and he stares and shivers, and she finally forms her first words: "Help me."

"Why's the way home always longer than the way there?" asks Sookie, as Sam drives them back toward Bon Temps. He says that's philosophical, which she didn't intend it as, but I would call the central statement of this entire episode, if not this entire season. We spend our days and hours walking further and further into the woods, into the magical and terrifying forest, and then the forest becomes the thing we must walk through to get out again, to get home again. He complains that he's a simple guy and she laughs at him, but he means it: "I may be a shapeshifter, but I want what every man wants: A good life, a good woman." She watches his face and asks if he loves Tara, and he thinks for awhile, shifting in his seat, and decides to tell the truth. "You know, I like her a lot. I care about her for sure. I've been trying to love her, but, you know, she don't make it easy..." Sookie shakes her head. "Well, she can't help it. When you've never had much love..." She's talking about Tara, but she's talking about herself too. And about Sam, who agrees.

"Believe me, I know, but... It's... It's not working. You know, we're friends, is all. And I'm not so easy to love, either," he says, trying to get her to walk here with him. Sookie tells him he's wrong, he's imminently lovable, and they are both pleased with themselves a moment; he takes the next obvious step in this conversation: "Do you love Bill?" He watches her face, now, and she thinks hard too, not about what to hide for once but about the actual truth, saying it aloud, discovering it as it is written. "I think I do, but... Where is he? If vampire politics are more important to him than me... I don't know. I'm so mad at him I could spit." He begged to be her possum, to drown in her rage and soak it up, to take on her hate and sadness and fear and self-loathing and carry it himself, and she told him no: that she'd hate him forever. Like Jason hates and loves Amy, like he hated and loved Eddie for being the possum of their ugliness and the truth behind their beautiful relationship. Sam nods and agrees she has any number of reasons for feeling angry and abandoned; she changes the subject: "I'm sorry you're having to drive so far." Sam plays it off, saying he loves driving and riding in a car, and she laughs affectionately, sharing the new territory with him, rewarding him for trusting her finally with his secrets: "Of course you do!" Flirty: "Go on, hang your head right out the window if you feel like it." He laughs, no shame at all for the first time in his life: two beautiful, strange creatures, called by the night, celebrating their power instead of fearing it. "Yeah, I appreciate that, but it's a private pleasure." Sookie laughs. Private pleasures.

"One day when all this is over, I'm gonna save up and rent a convertible, take it to the Gulf. Lie on the beach, bake in the sun..." In the sunlight, with breakfast, nobody around to bring her down or make her feel anything other than completely normal and completely relaxed. "It's a date," he says bashfully. He loves riding in cars; she gets shy too, and after long silence another real Sookie rears her head, the innocent shoeless Sookie who would shrug off all this romance and complication if she could, and just have fun: "Do you know any car songs?" It is strong to admit you want to do real bad things, when we live in a daylight world where real bad things are really bad, dangerous if not deadly; it's something stronger to ask for real good things, when the night is taking over.

Jason unbuckles his belt, after dinner, and practically belches his approval; Amy says she learned to cook from her childhood maid, who was French. She stands up, now that he's happy again. "Hey, if I show you something, you have to promise that you're not gonna get mad." Jason, dodging the anvils as always, laughs that he'll never be mad at her again, and she retrieves the final vial out of the refrigerator: "I saved one drop." He stands up, betrayed, and heads out of there, away from her, to change out of his work clothes and shut out the whole world. "Babe, please don't flip," she murmurs, following him into the bedroom, and weaves another spell. "We both know that we're for real. That we're gonna have a life together." He asks what she's doing with the blood then, beyond killing him slowly and driving his mind completely bonkers in the process. "I can't trust you for a second," he says, and she reverses his syntax: "You can trust me *totally, for always*." She says she wants symmetry, and of course he doesn't know what that means, and then she gives the most awesomely nonsensical, totally typical and frightening pre-rehab speech of all time.

"Balance. Harmony. Beauty. Babe, this vial is our past. We started with V, so we should end it with V. Like closing a circle. So we can start a new circle, our new life together. I'm through with the blood, it's only a symbol. But the circle... I mean, that's what's important to me." He stands up, out of her embrace, freaking out, and she makes a false frown: "Never mind. I'm gonna go by myself." She feints the bottle to her lips, as though any junkie is going to sit still for that. "Now I'm not gonna let you do that. But this is the last fucking time..." She toasts their future and pours the drop into her mouth, then holds it there -- blood, in her mouth, with her tongue hanging out -- and kneels on the bed, sharing the drop with him like a momma bird. It is disgusting and ridiculous and funny and sad. The ways we pour our hungers into new skins and say they are the truth is just a girl with a mouthful of blood doing drugs with a half-naked moron and calling it love. What they have is beautiful.

Bill follows Jessica through the forest as she scratches at roots and digs up mushrooms and flowers, sniffs at the bark of trees: hungry, senses alive, a whole world you can read like the longest novel in the world. Alive for the first time. He is so much less compelling than that, but he doggedly tries: "You drank from me. Your blood was replaced with mine and then I shared my essence with you when we slept together in the ground." ("Ew!" she shouts) "No, no, not intercourse." Filthy Jessica rolls her eyes like Selma Blair in every movie ever, grossed out: "You just said *intercourse*!" She hurls herself away from him again. "It's tradition, it's part of the process, it's magical. Even we don't fully understand how it works." Jessica says her Daddy is going to kick his ass unless he takes her home, and Bill sits her down firmly on a log. She gives him the toddler interrogation:

"Stop!" Why? "Because we need to talk." Why? "There are things you must learn." Why? "Because you are no longer human." Why? "Because, as I've been trying to explain to you, you have been made vampire." After a long thought: Why? "Because you were unlucky. Because life and death are unfair." He's so sad, so guilty, so clueless: "And because of me." He towers over her, looking down, fairly clicking his tongue with sorrow for her and for him and for all of us, so somber and silly: "You cannot go home. That part of your life is over." That's not her story, it's his, and it's only his because he's addicted to it, living in the pain of his life like Tara Mae Thornton, blaming Lorena like Lettie Mae instead of taking responsibility for the next chapter, and only Jessica could ever help him understand this. We learn how truly to be sons and daughters only once we've had children of our own.

"No more Mama and Daddy. No more little sister?" He shakes his head, full of sadness for her. Full of the guilt that nourishes him every day. "No more belts. No more clarinets. No more homeschool..." She stands up, scaring him to death in a whole new way. "No more rules. Yeehaw! I'm a vampire! Woo!" She runs off the road and he fusses behind her, grabbing the TruBloods and following her out. "No, no, no, no. There are rules. That's what I tried to teach you..." She tells him, sensibly, that he has really missed the point. "Crap on your rules. Crap, crap, crap. I can say anything I want now. Shit, shit, shit. Damn, hell, fuck! Fuck, that's a bad one. Fuck, fuck, fuck. What's another cussword so I can say it? *I'm a damn vampire!*" she laughs, twirling in the moonlight, and she becomes beautiful.

-- Page 19 --

"If you calm down, I will teach you what being a vampire means..." Jessica explains to him that she knows what it means, obviously: "I'm not stupid. I can read." He sits on yet another log and invites her to explain it to him. "It means that I don't have to sit like a lady," she says, demonstrating, "And I can kill anybody I want. And there's an *awful lot of people I'd like to kill*," this last less frightening than simply earnest. She is a person to whom bad things have happened, and now God has handed her justice. What's a few hours in a car trunk and a night in the ground sharing "essences" with a dork compared to that? That was yesterday. It's so rare that we're handed a complete and total do-over, and he keeps telling her no, that's not what happens: Every wonderful thing you're feeling right now dirty and ugly, and you are a dirty and an ugly girl. You still have not earned happiness, or glory, or the right to love yourself; Pluto will never be a planet again. Nothing he wasn't taught, himself, by a mother crueler than Lettie Mae and wiser than Miss Jeanette.

"No, Jessica, you absolutely cannot kill anybody you want," he says intensely, and she sends up a gorgeous, improbable wail: "But why? Why? I want to kill them..." She moans as he quotes Stan Lee at her -- "With your new powers come new responsibilities" -- and demands that she mainstream, like him. She makes another run for it, putting space between them in the clearing. "You can live almost exactly the same life as you did before, except you'll be awake at night..." The life she lived before made her murderous and sad; she's saying she doesn't want to be locked up at night, that she chooses Werewolf Guy over Vampire Guy, that she'll make her own way in the world. "I want to kill people," she yells, stomping and rational and wise, "And I'm so hungry, and all you do is talk and I'm starving and you are so mean; you're supposed to take care of me, that's what you said [you were supposed to bail me out, wash my clothes, feed me, help me grow], and oh, you suck!" Her tears become crazy, amazing laughter. "That's funny, because you do suck!" Oh Jessica, you don't even know.

Bill nods and hands her a TruBlood, praying it will calm her the fuck down, but she spits it out immediately. "Augh! It tastes like shit! *Why are you doing this to me?*" He begs her to try more, promising it's not that bad, and she gives him an amazing look: "Fuck no, and you can't force me. I will report you." She clarifies, awesomely: "I'll find a *real* vampire, and he'll kick your ass." Bill shakes his little bangs all around like an adorable Appaloosa colt who has been asked to program a VCR, and she goes back to crying and screaming and wailing. "You won't let me do *anything* and I am *so hungry!* You are the worst *Maker* ever!" She sobs like a five-year-old who hasn't slept in six weeks, and he stares at her, cutely, going, "This is fucking incomprehensible."

-- Page 20 --

Kenya brings Lettie Mae into Tara's cell, and things go from bad to awfully worse. "What took you so damn long to show?" Lettie Mae sits and explains that she first called Mabel, of the Fucked Up Church Hat brigade, and prayed with her. "Pray? While I'm locked up waiting? Cut this bullshit. Y'all can pray after you post my bail!" Tara has sort of had it. Lettie Mae explains she's not there to pay Tara's bail, and Tara gets real: "Momma, I'm tired. I hurt all over. I want to go home. Don't play with me." She's not playing. For the first time she's not playing. Even seeing Tara all strung out in the jail cell is killing her, with memories of how many nights she spent here, crazy with liquor, lost to herself and the Lord: "Not many," Tara spits, "Because I *bailed you out*." And then Lettie Mae says a thing that surprisingly put me on her side for the duration: "Maybe you shouldn't have."

And I mean, there are things that are true and things that are not true. The thing that is true here is that Tara could take away her salvation with one word, "Nancy," and even as her heart is breaking in her fragile chest she refuses to do that, to strip her mother of her sanity again. But the other true thing is that Tara is twenty-five, and needs to get a damn life. Whether or not her mother is drunk on Jesus or the real stuff, whether Lettie Mae is possessed by a demon or her own self-obsession, Tara was right to leave the night she knocked her head in, or any of the nights we didn't see before that. It's obnoxious and annoying that Lettie Mae's doing this now, but it's not wrong. She explains that Tara no longer has a home, and that she's watching her change before her eyes, and it's terrifying. "I am committed to salvation and you're on the road to hell. I would save you if I could, baby, nobody loves you more. But you're a danger to my soul and I can't have you in my house."

Which is harsh, sure, but less harsh than the twenty-five years of physical and emotional abuse leading up to this moment. Does it really fucking matter what Lettie Mae thinks, or what she does, at this point? Who's writing this story? Who's Tara letting drive? That little black-eyed girl didn't die, she went inside. That's her talking now: "I'm the only reason you *have* a house. After all the times I cleaned you up, all the times you beat me and stole my money, then sent me to school..." She nearly chokes on saying it, this deepest hurt, "...Dirty. In dirty clothes. So people laughed at me, and called me names. My whole life is shit because of you!"

-- Page 21 --

Which, I mean, is simply not true. A run of fifteen shitty years is impressive. But then the next day comes, and the day after that, and there's no amount or kind of love that should keep you in a house where they brain you with liquor bottles. Demon or not. You can't wipe away the past or stab the demon to death, but it's still your responsibility to keep walking. You can dance with her; you can take her into your body; you can tell just yourself the secret

if no one else will do; you can love her, because she is you, and you can remember that there isn't a room in your house that is closed to you, or too painful to eventually walk around inside. These are the options, and they have nothing to do with anybody but you, and the covenants you make with yourself. That whole speech was in the past tense, and that's not where we live now.

Lettie Mae weeps, horrified to hear it, knowing twenty years of guilt and shame, but stays strong in the onslaught. She knows she's doing the right thing, and she is doing the right thing. She begs Tara to stop, but Tara won't; Tara unleashes everything she has like Pandora's Box: "And the first time I'm in trouble, you turn your back on the one person who's always stood by you. And you call yourself a Christian? Fuck you. You're not my mother. Get out of my sight, you evil bitch. You don't love me, and you never did." That's all of it. Every thing she ever feared; every thing they ever feared separately and together, out on the table: that's the demon. This is the exorcism. Because I'll tell you this -- as Lettie Mae's stumbling away through her tears, promising that one day Tara will she's doing the proper, the loving, the motherly thing -- you look down in Pandora's Box and there's one thing left, and that's hope. Tara didn't say "Nancy," to her mother, and left her with hope. And that is good enough for me.

Amy and Jason kiss, on his black sheets; the sun and rain come together, pouring down on them in bed; he feels it on his lips; she jumps on the mattress, like an earthquake; they run out, through the walls that no longer exist, into a lovely green field, and in the dining room, the candles are still burning on the table -- because they are idiot druggies -- when the Killer enters -- he walks slowly through Jason's house as they dance, in the rain and the sun, him in his underwear and her in a simple white shift, playing love games, zooming through the lush grass and the warm rain and a thousand rainbows, and the Killer enters their bedroom, crushing the Vial and stopping short; he watches them on the bed, holding hands across the sheets as they sleep; they cheer, and play like children, rolling in the grass, laughing at the wide-open sunshine; he puts her on his shoulders and runs through rainbows, driven by love in this house and this bed and in the infinite unfurling of the beauty and the light within them both, and the Killer removes his belt as Jason kisses her in the rain, and their love is a song as loud as the world, and the Killer loops the belt around her neck, and she strangles as Jason kisses her, in the sun and rain, and he tosses her into the air, because they can fly, and she rises on the breeze in the sun and the rain and he falls to the ground, laughing, with the sun on his skin. And then she's gone.

-- Page 22 --

It was the best one yet. He rolls over with a face lit up like Christmas, joyful and grinning and tired. She's slower coming out of it; he looks down at her full of love and shouts, "Earthquake!" bouncing on his knees. She doesn't wake, and he pulls her toward him on the bed, neck and arms limp and sprawling. He leans in to kiss her awake, like a prince in a story, but she's gone. The welts around her neck: Maudette, Dawn. Grief, and behind that fear, and then an old guilt coming back again. "No, hey." He listens for her breath, but she's cold. He chokes on it. "No. God. No, please. Please." He strokes her hair, and kisses her cold lips; he picks up the phone and dials, looking to her for bravery. It is the bravest thing he's ever done, and the dumbest. He's numb to Rosie's happy shout, on the other end of the 911 dispatch line, and asks for them to come.

Jessica stares out at Fangtasia! from Eric's office, hungrily. Eric is amused, asking WTF Bill wants from him. "I wanna go to the bar," she declares, in wonderment. "I wanna be one of

those dancers. I'm hungry..." Bill whines to Eric that she won't listen; he's worried about Sookie even though he knows she's all right, and doesn't have time to -- yikes -- teach Jessica obedience. "*I don't obey anybody*," she says, firmly and with conviction, not a whine at all but a woman being born. "Those days are over." Eric needles him about his lack of control, tapping his shoulder: "Man up, my friend. She's not even one night old." He asks Jessica if she doesn't want to stay with her Maker, like Pam, and her answer is immediate and heartfelt: "No. He's a dick." She takes note of Eric's hotness and, because she was raised to go for Vampire Guy, to head straight for the most powerful man in the world, suppliant and coquettish, asks to sit in his lap. Maybe the most troubling line in the entire episode.

"Nobody lets me having any fun. *Fuckers!*" Eric gets intense and tells her to sit her ass down, activating all kind of previous plumbing and wiring, and she slams the door behind her. "See," he says quietly to Bill, "You have to be tough with them, or they'll walk all over you." Bill goes full-on [Betty Draper](#), all, "You can see how she is!" and then obliquely goes, "And there are urgent matters to which I must attend." Eric knows who he means, and asks if Bill hasn't, in the past couple days, done more than enough on her behalf. "If any harm were to come to her because of my absence," Bill nearly shouts, "You would be..." Eric leans in real fucking close: "...What?" Bill crumbles weakly: "...Without her helpful skills." Jessica beats on the door, begging to go out, begging to do something bad, and Bill and Eric come to an agreement: help now, favor later. "How would you like to learn how a real vampire feeds?" Eric asks, as Bill rolls his eyes, and Jessica folds her hands together like a good daughter should: "Oh, yes sir. Please, sir." Eric's like, "See how hard this is? Douche."

-- Page 23 --

A woman with severe black hair and bangs, a woman you might recognize, in a flowy social worker outfit, stands outside Tara's cell. She's paid Tara's bail, and Kenya tells her to pull it together before letting Maryann Forrester in to speak with her. "I'd like to help you, if you'll let me." Tara asks if she's "some kind of social worker," and she grins, thinks, and agrees. "Yeah, that's about right. Kenya knows me. I'm in and out of here all the time, working with people in your position." Tara's question is not so much a question: *My position.* "Mm," Maryann nods. "DUIs, minor assaults, public drunkenness. You know, those times when things go just a little too far?" That's where she lives, in the places where we go too far, in the times that we forget ourselves. If Jessica was born of Bill's need to atone, and comments on it, then Maryann was born of Tara's need to see real magic in action. To be transformed.

"It can happen to anyone. And I expect you have your reasons?" Tara admits she has reasons, not that she can name them beyond one word, "Nancy," and she immediately turns down Maryann's offer of a ride home. "Well," she sort of laughs, "They gave me your address. And you can't walk there, it's too far." Tara shakes her head, knowing she'll come up with something, and in any case she's not going home. She has no home. She's not going there, she got kicked out. "You don't have anywhere to go? No family, no friends?" Both question and manipulation, but also a confirmation: Nobody will miss you? "I don't want them to see me like this..." She puts on her best friendly, grateful, conversation-ending polite smile. "It's okay. I'll think of something." Maryann sits in the bunk just across: "Tara. I'm sure you've barely slept or eaten. What if you come to my home? Just till you get things figured out."

Tara's getting a weird vibe, but Maryann laughs again: "No no, there's plenty of room. I do this all the time. It's sort of an informal halfway house... You can shower, you can wash your

clothes, you can let me feed you. Then you can go on your way and my conscience will be clear. Hm?" It's informal, and halfway. She doesn't lie, this one. And I'm not operating from a spoiler place, because there aren't any spoilers at this point, and this character is radically different in the books and I have no idea what Maryann Forrester's agenda is, but I do think that Tara is headed exactly one place, which is past the crossroads and past her historical pain and right on into the very fucking madness, and that the only way out is through, so these are educated guesses having less to do with the books and more to do with the fact that it's my job to think about this shit.

-- Page 24 --

"You're not a Jesus person, are you?" Maryann laughs, and I am not being hyperactive when I say it is a *Dark Knight*-level laugh. My favorite part in that movie is when a certain person sits at the bedside of another person to whom he has just done some terrible, life-altering things, and when the person wakes up this person goes, "...Hi." It's maybe my favorite moment in the entire movie, followed closely by Maryann's laughter here: first a startled "No! Ha!" and then a slightly more introspective, darkly musing exhalation toward the floor: "Nnnnnooooooooo." She assures Tara she has nothing against religion, which is like your acid dealer saying he's got nothing against Payless Shoes, or your plumber saying he's not a huge fan of the Red Sox, and then stands up and hands over her business card and fusses with her purse long enough for Tara to swallow her pride and agree to go.

Outside, Maryann's red sports car causes another tiny meltdown, but Maryann assures her it was a gift, a tribute, a way of repaying doing something or not doing something. Tara hesitates getting in because it's so shiny and she's so dirty, and Maryann fairly winks: "Oh, don't worry about that. I get dirty too!" Andy, having just arrived with Jason in tow, screams at her to move the car, and she's almost unbearably scary, smiling easily at him and summoning up his name: "Detective... Bellefleur, is it?" She points at him like he's going in Pam's vault, and as he mumbles and bitches to himself she hops in the car beside Tara and they take off, just a second too late to see Jason Stackhouse heading into a madness of his own.

A movie about breakfast, daylight on a farm, the cock crowing; Sookie's close to Sam on the couch. She realizes that, weird as it sounds, she had fun today. "Well, that says something for us," Sam laughs, agreeing: "We can enjoy ourselves even when we're trying to find a murderer." Sookie laughs, but she's always thought he was fun; it's one of the reasons she's stayed working with him so long. He gets shy and she laughs at him. "Well, it's not the tips or the high-class clientele!" she says, and Sam changes gears: "You know, it was probably the best day of my life when you walked in looking for a job." She absentmindedly tells him to quit, but her eyes are elsewhere.

Lingering on sunrise, boys that don't leave, secrets that make men even more special, choices you can make, any bed in the house you can sleep in, boys that keep you safe and boys that promise to keep you safe and then can't stop leaving. This trip to Bunkie, the day before -- everything after Bill left, again -- she spent pretending, trying on this life for size. Could you do this? Eat breakfast in Adele's house, Adele's recipes, with a beautiful uncomplicated man helping you solve crimes and adoring you every day? A man who wouldn't take away the sun, who could ride all the way to the coast with his head in the wind, and then bake in the sun, who loves your scent more than any other, who doesn't lead you into the dark places, who doesn't have to sink his teeth into your throat in order to come?

Sam strokes her hair, swearing he means it; she already knows. The best of his whole life, and the days after, dedicated to her and her alone. No creepy shapeshifters' councils and threesomes and nests and werebangers; nobody calling her a whore, or trash; nobody hating her for whom and how she loves. Safe, protected, but free to come and go. Free to howl, and to lay out in the sun; to share the sunlight on her skin instead of being devoured for it. "Are you looking in my head?" he asks, and only because she's a lunatic is it okay that she responds, "I'm looking in your heart." He kisses like a beast.

Bill slams the door open and, fangs out, zoomjumps on Sam, who tosses him handily over the couch. She screams, but it's not really about her so they don't hear her. Bill leaps back over the couch and throws Sam around, hands around his throat; she keeps screaming but it's not about her. Bill bitchslaps Sam and he punches back, and finally Sookie smashes a vase over Bill's head: "Stop! Stop fighting, you stupid men!" Bill shouts that Sam's hands were on her, and Sam points out that she's nobody's property. Not *Mine*, not *Yours*, but *Sookie's*. (The downside being, puppy love or not, he's not *Hers* in the vampire sense anyway, which they already fought about last week.) She tells them both to shut the eff up, and yells at Bill all on her own. "You left me alone, with no promise to come back... And attack the man who's helping keep me safe? How *dare* you?"

But she has the sunlight on her skin now, too. It was a shock, to go from the easy and warm back to the cold and hard. When Bill's not fighting the Trio for ownership of her, he's fighting Eric for ownership of her, or collaborating in Eric's ownership of them both, and now he's fighting Sam -- poor Sam who owns nothing and nobody at all -- for ownership of her: when does that stop? It's comforting to be His when the option is death or feeding some other fanger, but she's not really His. He can't really believe that, can he? Not when she's giving up so much to be with him: breakfast, and sunlight, her last chance of social acceptance... If anything, he's Hers, isn't that right? He would kill for her, he would die for her, he is a tiger in the form of a man with mystic powers beyond the telling of it; she gave him her body and her virginity and her blood, and for what? So that he could cage her up, like a wild thing? Of the two, she's only ever woken up with one of them.

"Get out!" she screams finally, and he's shocked. "If you knew what I had done to return to you..." Who cares? You didn't come in time, and when you did come you did it the wrong way, confirming every fear and killing every fantasy. I've known Sam for years, I've known you for weeks, and you know what? I've never had a moment's happiness with you. You are the darkness, and I consort with you, but some happiness is easy. Warm, and easy, under the sun. "I rescind your invitation." His fangs pop back in immediately, all lust gone with the words. He begs her not to do it, as she walks him slowly backwards, eyes on his, toward the door. It hurts her, but there is this: back when she invited him in, death was something that happened to other people. And ever since she invited death into her home, it has taken everything from her. It has come for her a hundred times. This is her house now, her seat of power and the one place she should be able to feel safe. She slams the door in his face, and he weeps.

Inside, she shrugs off Sam's manipulative race-hate shit, all "Can't you see what he's really like? How can you think about be with him?" and finally screams the most awesome thing. "My living room's wrecked, I've got a killer, a vampire and a shapeshifter on my plate. Right

about now, I'm not thinking about being with anybody." She pushes her way through the house.

Maryann pulls up outside a beautiful mansion, antebellum columns, a hundred bedrooms. It looks shiny, and new, like it might have sprung up in the night. Like the car, like Maryann's clothes, like everything in the fairytale where the better mother calls you in, to warm yourself by the hearth. It could be made of candy. "This is where you live? Fuck me..." Maryann laughs, and ushers her in: "Make yourself at home. I insist." She opens the door -- no lock, it's like a dream, it's made of gingerbread -- and the door swings heavily open, and Tara enters that house by the silvery moonlight, and her initiation begins again.

Jason sits limp and slack in the station, Bed Dearborn watching him in anguish and disappointment and love while Andy struts and does his creepy sexual masculinity-jealousy crap. "People said *No, not Jason Stackhouse, he's too dumb!* But I knew. I said, 'That shifty bastard's a goddamn psychopath.'" Jason is pretty sure it's true, at this point, but stupidly calls him Andy, which earns him a bark of "detective!" Jason has just enough juice left to roll his eyes at the martinet, and Bud asks him what happened. Before he can speak, Andy goes off again: "I'll tell you all about it, I'll tell you exactly what happened. This piece of shit lured those poor girls into his king-size bed and dirty sheets, to fuck them and kill them!" Bud reminds Andy that Jason totally called them and came in willingly, so would Andy mind actually letting him confess?

-- Page 27 --

"Go ahead, Jason. How'd it happen?" Jason realizes he has very little material to work with, given that he knows basically as much or less than Bud and Andy about the various murders -- his quiet "I don't know" drives Andy Bellefleur bats. "Bud, give me five minutes alone with him, I'll get you every detail!" Bud asks WTF he means, and Jason's like, technically I don't remember what he did to any of them, but -- crying, exhausted, really in need of a firm hugging -- "They keep dying all around me, so I gotta be the guy, right?" Bud's like, "Um, how about another way? Let's take them one at a time." Andy suggests Amy, since she was the most recent victim and thus fresher in Jason's "so-called mind."

"I took V," Jason says, and Bud shakes his head sadly while Andy crows -- Because how else could Jason have thrown him so terrifically far? -- "Not with the others, just with her. We both did. And when I woke up, Amy was... Well, like she was." Jason watches Jason unable to say the word; unable to comprehend that even if he HAD done it, he's still allowed to be heartbroken. The girl who loved him, the only girl who ever looked him in the eye and saw how extraordinary and good and wise and human he really is, is gone. Wiped. "Dead's the word you're looking for. Stone-cold dead." Jason tells himself the story: they were alone in the house, and high on a drug that makes you act crazy sometimes, so he must have done it: "But I don't know why! And honest to God, I loved her!" Andy screams about how he hated her, hated Maudette and Dawn, and Jason shakes his head -- they're collaborating on this, in Jason's mind, trying to figure out why and how he is the Killer, and Andy keeps tossing out the wrong theories and clues and evidence, and it's frustrating because he just wants to solve the mystery, and Andy keeps interjecting his personal shit and weirdness and fucked up hateful theories, when the fact is, if he did it, the mystery is in this room and it needs to be solved. Jason is the mystery.

"Aw, I didn't hate them! I mean, we had some pretty good times. It was... It was fucking and fighting, like with any girl. I just... I don't understand what would have made me do it." Bud

is sad for him. (I must admit I kind of hated Maudette, but I didn't kill her either, because I'm only slightly fictional and she is all-the-way fictional, and plus if I killed her you better believe Randi Sue's ass would be in a ditch by now.) Andy starts yelling about how Adele must have suspected Jason's nature and pushed him to stab her all up, and Jason's face twists in the same way as it did when Eddie died: disgust and sadness and pain and total insult: "No, I didn't kill Gran and you know it! You better damn well find who did!" Different mystery, not the one that has torn his life completely apart today, from the roof to the foundation. "This is the worst confession I ever heard in my life!" Andy yells, which is adorable, but Jason's just had it: "Fuck you, Andy! That's all I got! Look, I don't want to hurt nobody else. Lock me up. For Christ's sake, lock me up."

-- Page 28 --

Jason retreats into himself, shadowed, and Andy's all over him about waterboarding this and Gitmo that, and Bud's like, "Enough, dude. Lock him up." So Andy marches him away toward a cell, and over on the fax machine Drew Marshall's face is printing up, and Rosie's calling her friend to tell her the news about the Killer: "Yes, I swear. He's looking all crazy in a hot way -- you know him -- but they're throwing him in a cell right now. We are so lucky he didn't kill us..." says Rosie, and plops a bunch of files on top of the picture of Drew Marshall, now known as Rene Lanier of Bon Temps in Renard Parish, with the cute little Cajun butt and the fake little Cajun accent, and the sister he loved more than anything, until she disappointed him for good.

Next week: Maryann shows a couple of her cards, Rene comes back for Sookie for like the eighth time I guess, Jason finds a new notoriety, Jessica makes herself comfortable in the better world she's found, Lafayette pays the price for speaking truth to dangerous drug addicts with power, and Sam loses ... one loyal customer, at least. I'm looking forward to seeing it, but not to saying goodbye to you, so I guess we'll take it as it comes.

## ALL SIGNS ARE VITAL

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 12 | Aired on 11.23.2008

*You'll Be The Death Of Me* - The Fangbanger Strangler is brought to justice, Jason joins a new congregation, Tara makes some scary new friends, and a bunch of people die. Some of them even stay that way.

Jason has three visitors in jail: Rene Lenier, Sookie, and finally a dude from Newlin's church, the Fellowship of the Sun -- best known for their double-talking hatred of vampires. Tara's living it up at Maryann's with her new guitar-playing hottie friend Eggs, and has no idea that A) she is being deliberately cut off from her friends or B) that sometimes Maryann goes blurry in her yard in a super freaky way.

Sookie spends the rest of the day freaking out about Jason, talking about how she's going to find the real killer just as soon as that fax comes in, and ignoring every possible sign that Rene's the killer to the point of letting him drive her home. Once there, her psychic powers finally kick in and she realizes he's Drew Marshall, the Fangbanger Strangler. Then he kind of menacingly chases her around the house in slow-motion for about a million years being creepy, she runs to the graveyard for no reason, and he bashes her head in.

Meanwhile, Sam has smelled his road crew jacket and comes barking down the road, but Rene bashes *his* head in as well, so he turns back into a man. Down underground, Vampire Bill hears Sookie freaking out and *throws himself out into the sun* to save her, but is slowed down by the fact that sunlight causes vampires to burst into flames. After most of his face falls off, he drops to the ground about a hundred yards from where Rene is freaking out on Sam and Sookie, but he's just close enough that his presence wakes Sookie up. She pulls it together enough to smash Rene in the head with a shovel, then fully chops off his head. It is amazing.

Sookie cries and whines and moans and beats her breast at Bill's side as he's slowly cooking in the sun. Finally, naked Sam points out that they should probably stick him in the ground, and solemnly does so, which means all three of these fools has now saved each other's bacon like six times in succession. Sam takes her home, and doped-up to the point of hilarity, Sookie tells him -- in front of Tara and Lafayette -- that he is totally awesome, and they kind of love each other. Guilty Arlene and hyperactively redeemed Jason come by to visit, and Tara tells Sam that (now that Bill is likely *dead-dead*) he can have Sookie. She returns to Maryann... But not before a showdown between Maryann and Sam suggests a rich and totally freaky history. Then Bill comes back to Sookie, totally healed and having fed on somebody, and they make out.

Two weeks later, things are different for everybody: Vermont passes the right to vampire marriage, Hoyt is looking for a vampire bride around his age, and Bachelorette #1 seems to be Jessica, whom Eric and Pam unceremoniously drop off at Daddy Bill's because she's too annoying even for their arch sanguinity, so he makes that freaked-out face I like. Jason has joined the Fellowship of the Sun and taken that vacant look behind his eyes to a whole new level, Tara is spouting off Maryann's philosophies (sort of a cross between Tony Robbins, Nietzsche and *The Secret*), much to Sam's consternation... And Lafayette's body is found in the back of Andy's car.

Want more? The full recap starts right below!

Once upon a time, in a land not far from this one, there lived a little boy. His favorite thing in the world was his body: a strange country, just like yours. One you could spend the days and years of your life mapping, journeying, and never without a strange new discovery. It was the chariot he rode. It was wonderfully and terribly made, and the songs it wrote upon itself were wordless. He knew he would never know it fully, not in a way you can say out loud, because those songs were songs that had no words. Sometimes it surprised him. The little boy had no parents to speak of, but it was a good life: right on the edge of the forest, where day becomes night and men become beasts. Where witches and wolves and worse dwelt, calling to him all day and all night: "Come and find out!"

The boy had a little sister, with a body of her own. The songs it sang were different, and none of his concern. He only knew, from the top of his beautiful head to the soles of his strong feet, that he must protect her. They lived in a wilderness, full of strange things under the moon and the sun, and there are a million ways you can hurt yourself if you don't have a map. There are valleys and shadows we walk into with our eyes open, following old instructions, hearing old songs calling across to us, saying, "Come and find out!" It is for men to protect their little sisters, their daughters and their wives, from songs like this. The little boy knew this as well as he knew anything. So he stayed close to home and he kept an eye on his sister, whose purity he shared. And if she went down, he knew, he would go down too.

One day, Death came to town. Just for a little visit, he said. And she was beautiful, and powerful, and the little boy knew he could explain all the secrets in this world. Even the secrets of the flesh. The language Death spoke had no words: It was a song about everything we don't have words for. Sex, and danger; running in the night with blood beating in your ears. Death was a welcome home, and Death was an invitation to the night. The little boy sat across the table from Death, and looked upon his beauty, and desired her: but this was one of those bad places he knew he shouldn't go. He could look on Death and smile, and he could pay tribute; he could give her a kindness and share a meal, but then it went no further. And the sun would come up, regular as clockwork, and the little boy and his sister would have breakfast together, and talk about anything but Death.

-- Page 2 --

And then the little boy -- all the little boys -- figured out that the joke was on him: all the time he'd spent, guarding the door and listening at windows, and it turned out his sister had pulled a chair up to the table, and was eating gratefully with Death. Sharing little secrets he was too cowardly to know; singing songs of which he'd only heard bits and pieces in his dreams. His sister and Death were lovers, laughing behind their hands at him, sharing countryside and clearing that he would never know. His sister turned her face from the sun, and ran in the night, dancing under the moon, mad with desire. Her purity, and his: running red with blood. And the little boy knew a thing, and put that thing away: he wanted to make love to Death. He knew he would grow up then, and enter Death's kingdom, and would know those moonlight songs. And he wanted it so badly, but he was afraid. His body was an unknown kingdom, with secrets and shames he could only put into words. But he looked upon his sister, and Death, and he was ashamed.

Sometimes in the dreams he was his sister, submitting under Death's hand; aching beneath him, offering her sweet neck, stretching up and out of herself slowly, in ecstasy. Sometimes he was Death herself, clawing at skin and biting at the neck, growling like a wolf, howling like the wilderness. Once he fantasized that he was both at once: fucking Death like he

fucked women. It scared him, so terribly, because Death was muscled and furious, gorging on blood, looking up at him with eyes clouded by desire. And that was when he knew: he had to kill his sister, to keep her safe. To keep himself safe, and wall off his whole kingdom. He changed his name, and become someone else. He was a shapeshifter, he surprised himself, and he watched himself as he was changing. And no matter how far he ran or how much he grieved, still there was that voice, singing across the night that made us all: "Come and find out!"

He had a brother, too.

"You know that old leather jacket I wear sometime? The brown one? Well, make sure it goes to Hoyt. I told him it was lucky. It ain't. But he don't know that. Uh... Sookie'll get the house, my bank account," Jason thinks, in his cell, wondering what else he has to give. Now that everything's been taken, now that even his body has become a bloody mystery; now that his hands move while he is sleeping, of their own accord, to take the lives of the women he loved, one by one. "But I want you to have my truck." Rene leans on the bars, surprised, staring into Jason's cell, and Jason nods. Rene was always a good friend. Like a big brother: just as Eddie was telling him what manhood demands, Rene was there to show him. To love a good woman, to have a family, to be depended upon: these things require that you become dependable. The best parts of Rene are nothing to do with Drew, just as the best parts of Amy had nothing to do with Eddie. Rene and Eddie are the parts of the kingdom worth saving, when the fires start.

-- Page 3 --

Rene says Jason will get his truck back soon enough, but he knows the truth. They both do: "They ain't never letting me go, Rene. There's something inside me that's just... It's wrong," Jason says, choking on it: he is a killer. Rene looks at Jason, speaking hypothetically and truthfully at the same time. He could be angry, but that's another man entirely; what Jason says is that Rene is the truth, and Drew is just a secret better left buried. There are times when Rene knows that. We would all be safer if he believed, in fact: the division in him falls far deeper than the simple act of hiding Drew away, because the killer only exists as the price of a further division: the fact that Drew is a fangbanger, and he knows it. And this is a tale as old as time: the subdivision of our desires, the walling off of kingdoms, produces only hate.

This could be a story of senseless violence and hateful horror, coming from a clear blue sky: trust and kindness masking a deeper anger and chaos. But the truth is, we know Drew's story, start to finish. We've watched it for twelve weeks now, and it began at the same moment of our story. Kelly and Brad were giddy, curious, removed, until they met Death face to face. Jason Stackhouse was disgusted, turned on, ashamed and alive, when he saw the fang marks on Maudette's creamy thigh. In that moment, before Bill Compton ever walked into Merlotte's, he had a choice: to close his kingdom to Maudette, or to ride the horse that she provided, deeper and deeper into the forest. That night he watched a video, while she blew him, of Liam on her like a beast, chained to her ceiling, praying for pain and for eventual death. And all his words kept saying she was disgusting, good riddance to white trash, but his body heard something else: her mouth on his cock, her voice in his ear. "Come and find out!"

Drew stole that videotape. Kept in a secret place, sternly told himself not to watch it. And if Jason could have done, he would have done the same. But Maudette pretended to be dead,

and Jason thought to himself: "Now I am Death. No better and no worse than the creature on the tape. I have taken her like him, and I have visited pain and death upon her." And he ran, screaming, into Dawn's arms. Dawn, who was a little crazy -- in a hot way -- and the only person strong enough to withstand his infinite bullshit: the little boy who crawled sweetly into her arms, the little boy who crossed his arms on her bed and refused to leave. And once Dawn was a fangbanger too, the dreams started up again: he fantasized about fucking Liam, scaring himself. Inventing new forms of gay panic at the same rate the world was going crazy.

-- Page 4 --

He strapped on a mask, pretended to be Drew. He didn't even know Drew existed, but he knew -- based on what his body was telling him -- that there must be a Drew, somewhere in the world. There must be someone to stand against the darkness. He wore gloves Lafayette would have loved, and smoked a cigarette. And eventually she died too. It's what she wanted: to pull up a chair, and sit with Death, and drink awhile. And somewhere in there Jason knew it was what she deserved. To sit with Death and not to drink; to make love with Death. He knew how it made him feel, just to think about it: like trash, like he deserved pain, and worse than pain. And he could not conceive of a world in which anybody felt differently about it. Surely everyone had walls up in their kingdoms, separating dark from light, moon from sun; surely she was disgusted, in her way, by what desire made her do. And then came Bill Compton, and Sookie who always knows best went willing into those shadows. And then came V.

So what makes the difference? What makes Jason stay -- for better or worse -- Jason Stackhouse, while the same starting point, the same complex and incomprehensible desires, made Drew a killer of women? As you know, I think there is something exceptional about Jason, but I don't think that's it. I think Adele, Lafayette and Amy guided him through it, and out the other side. I can't say what makes a man become Drew Marshall, so I can't say for certain that Jason would never go there, but I can say that Adele gave him a lot to work with. And Lafayette guided him first to v-juice and then to Eddie, which were the things that saved him. And Amy, who showed him horrors while teaching him love, unconditional compassion, and the secret of life. But there was none of that for Drew, because Drew is not half as brave or half as wise as Jason Stackhouse: he just ditched himself, walled it off, became Rene Lanier. It was like declaring bankruptcy: everybody else pays the price.

But Rene can't imagine a world in which we walk that line even as gracefully as Jason has managed: there are good things and there are bad things, and there are real bad things. There is the day, and there is the night. I think if this season, this story, are about anything it's about the dangers of oversimplifying. We're handed soundbites all day, and we manufacture our own, and while it doesn't really contribute to living a fully authentic life, where things get really fucking bad is when we play that card on ourselves: I am bad, I must change. I am saved, I must achieve stasis. You are sick, I must destroy you. We pick a line in the chaos, when we've no way of being objective about the choice or the consequences, and we say: "This. This is my country. No more and no less." I am Rene Lanier, I am Jason Stackhouse.

-- Page 5 --

I am Amy Burley: God is love, and God loves everyone... Except the people who feed my addiction. In that case, God loves the predator. God is Gaia, the unknowable and beautiful

everything that V can show us... but *you* are not invited. If you tried to hold every everything in your mind your head would explode; nobody's expected to do that. To open yourself to things outside your little house is to experience God directly, even when it's terrifying; but open up too far, or stay that way too long, and you will disperse on the wind like a pillar of cloud. But everybody wants a chance to rest, to say, "This is as ambivalent as I can be about things today, while remaining myself." That's why it takes a guide: to snap us out of stasis when it's time, and then to close our gates when we're burning out. And once you realize you're going to keep circling that drain your entire life, the stress of maintaining any kind of consistent viewpoint becomes secondary to surviving, to compassion, to connection. You grow up, the world gets bigger. You stop ignoring the signs you don't want to read, stop designing reality to suit your bitterness and the areas you're small, and you realize your life is story, being told by you and by the world.

"Nah, come on now. It ain't like you went and killed a buncha... *innocent* women." As though there is such a creature. You start throwing around words like *innocence* and you start dividing the sheep from the goats, and then it's a small step to slaughter. What he's saying is that he's bloodied his hands to keep his kingdom safe, and would do it again; had he the choice he would not have killed a one. He wants to keep us all safe, and happy, and pure. No freaks. "They were fangbangers. If you hadn't have done it, it was a matter of time..." Jason knows Adele's death was different, but he's still incensed; call his sister a fangbanger and everybody feels awkward, but Adele? "Now, now. Don't get your back all up, you. I'm just sayin', you must've had your reasons, that's all." Because if not, then there is no story here. And if there's no story, then there's no Rene, because Rene is the story telling the story for Drew. Selling Jason out in that cell while apologizing for Drew's bad behavior. But Jason is not playing. "There ain't no good reason for what I did." These are the hard choices we make, in war.

Rene's interrupted by Hurricane Sookie, who pushes past the guards with high-pitched squeals and hurls herself against the bars, touching Jason's hands and face desperately. Jason begs for her forgiveness a thousand times, but she tells him to shut up, quit it, because no matter what he thinks he's not the murderer, and she's hot on the trail of Drew Marshall. What I find interesting is that in the first act of this season, the Killer just went around killing people and everybody was weirded out, and then in the second act Sookie was too busy mooning around and being seduced in the dirt by Bill's mysterious charms, but once Bill was gone? It took about five seconds of breakfast with Sam for her to snap out of it and go, "I am fucking sick of almost getting killed all the time." And by the end of that day, she knew everything about the killer except his face. Sookie tells Jason to stop confessing his big pile of nothing confessions every second, and vows to find Drew immediately. Rene stands behind them, but it's Drew's eyes watching.

-- Page 6 --

Rene watches, nervous, as Sookie explains to Jason about Cindy Marshall, her murderous brother, the fangbanger strangler. (*If she knows this how come she hasn't gone to the cops and gotten her brother out of that cell?*) Sookie whirls on Rene, snottily explaining the obvious, which is that she's been waiting for Andy to do something other than sexually fixate on her brother, or Bud to care what happens to fangbangers, and she's done. Rene surmises that she doesn't know for sure that he's the killer, and Sookie reminds him that she's read at least a little bit of his thoughts. (*They'll never believe that about him but it's the truth there's all kinds of strangeness in this world...*) Jason interrupts Rene's interesting train of thought and explains to his sister that, against all evidence and magic powers and the fact that he was

there, like actively *not killing anybody*, he's still fairly sure. She can't accept the truth, he says shaking: "I'm a murderer. And I'm going to hell. Plain and simple."

Not just a speech, but a plot point. He doesn't really say a whole lot, so it's best to pay attention. Down in the mental DNA Jason and Drew share, in their fangbanger gay panic brotherhood, there are the good and the bad. He is bad. If he were a killer, he'd turn the knife on himself, and go to Amy, and they would be free of sin and fear and addiction, finally together. There are those who deserve life and those who have it anyway, like God moving in the deeps, and then there are the third type: those who have life, and don't deserve it. "I'm a murderer and I'm going to hell." Plain and simple is the way he likes it; plain and simple is the way we all like it, when we're tired, or when we're lazy. Or when we've been taught we're capable of only that much.

And so much so that it physically hurts him to have her disagree, when she's always helped to steer him right: she doesn't know, how it felt to feel all that uncertainty drip away, to find out that he was something in the day world, a killer, and not something uncategorizable, or terrifying, or dirty like her. He is a murderer. The bodies pile up around him, without rhyme or reason except the easiest way of connecting the dots. The one person who told him he was worthwhile was dead in his bed; she's not there to tell him that anymore, and that's just more proof she was wrong. And something else, too, something huge he'll never say, the one murder he was conscious for. He killed Eddie, drunk and swaggering and chauvinist, pushing her buttons and pissing her off, daring her to fracture the untenable situation again. Sookie doesn't know that, because nobody knows that, and nobody ever will: he loved a man, a creature of God, and that man was murdered: he is a murderer and he's going to hell.

-- Page 7 --

Jason screams for Andy over her protestations, panicked and hurting and dreadfully guilty and afraid. Throw the cards up in the air again, take the world and the way it lined up this time, and who knows what happens next? It hurts just to think about. Andy comes, rumbling and slow, and soon enough muscles her out. She twitters at him all the way down the hall, about the fax with Drew's picture, and Andy blows her off and points back at Jason, and Rene: "The real killer is right there, where he belongs." But that's not exactly true either: he's standing right there, but Rene's standing there too. And Sookie levels pronouncement on Andy, just for completeness's sake: "You are one hell of a sorry excuse for a cop and a human being, Andy, and it's just a matter of time before everyone knows it." Poor old Andy Bellefleur. I sort of love him.

She flounces off, and Andy's all frustrated, but now think about it. You've got Andy, who puts all his mysteries on Jason and has become creepily obsessed with him as a result. You've got Drew, standing inside a costume made of his own skin, killing indiscriminately now: Adele, Amy, Jason. You've got Rene, who loves his fiancée and wants to be a good friend to Jason, whom he thinks of as a little brother. And you've got Jason, who created masks out of thin air and pretended, again and again, to be the Drew who never existed. That's a complete circle: Jason carrying Andy's shit, Drew carrying Jason's shit, Rene carrying Drew's shit, and Sookie Stackhouse -- who can look inside your mind, see into your heart -- setting every one of these decisions on fire, radicalizing every wall in every kingdom, just by being there. In one short scene she's managed to blow everybody's minds, just by telling the truth. She wasn't even that cool or interesting, but that's what she did. And in all that chaos, they harden as men must: Jason resolves himself to his damnation,

Andy resolves to overcome her assessment of him by any means necessary, and Drew realizes she's got to die before anything else can happen.

The key is finding a story that makes it fit, so it tells you what happens next and what the outcomes are. Drew and Cindy Marshall are Kay and Greta. Jason and Sookie Stackhouse are Hansel and Gretel. Tara Thornton is Psyche, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty: the princess locked in a castle, the evil stepmother wearing our beloved mother's face, the Fairy Godmother, the Blue Angel sent from Heaven, Satan in a Sunday hat. Dawn and Sookie are Little Red Riding Hood, grinning in the shadows. Maudette's story is the story of O, and of criminal desires; is self-extinguishment and Rimbaud and Artaud's lovely daughter. Andy is Hitchcockian, Andy is a Barth *Chimera*, a Phil Dick gumshoe, the son and heir of nothing in particular; Andy Bellefleur knows the key to the secret is the secret. Coroner Mike is Gepetto and Abraham, losing sons that were never his to the one world coroners can never know, but can only guard its gates.

-- Page 8 --

Amy Burley is Jacques Derrida and Franny Glass, in love with the world and the union of opposites; is the Archangel Michael, who knows the Garden is as large as the world and still must let only certain people in. Sam Merlotte is the Wolfman and the Little Match Girl, he is Galahad and Lancelot. Bill Compton is a fairytale all his own, hating the life and the skin that is his, desperate to connect with life, all shame and fear and self-abnegation, self-control; Bill Compton finds the whitest tender bird in the nest and holds her as softly as he can in his hands, to prove to himself and to life and to God that he's worth saving; Bill Compton is the whitest tender bird in the nest, and he holds himself so carefully.

But finding your story is half the battle, because the only constant is change and the only way out is through. Even telling your story is only half the battle, once you've found the words, because bodies don't speak in words. Once you know the story, the story stops being the answer, and we plateau. We begin to rot, until we start running again. We hold onto this salvation because we are exhausted, but the truth is this: Stories don't save us. Stories *change* us.

Tara wakes beneath a whore: *Le Grande Odalisque*, greatest of the Ingres concubines, smiling to herself on the wall like a girl with secret, a girl with a pearl earring. Her body is deformed, distended, idealized into art and away from nature. "Come and find out!" she says, with her back like a swan; "All you have to do is want," she says, like the Last Temptation. Something from *Peter & The Wolf* is playing, throughout the house; she snuggles down into the featherbed, the tender whiteness of her castle, and smiles to herself like a girl with a secret. A little more wakefulness, a little more light, and she bolts upright: where is she, in what world is her body, in what fantasy is she waking? There's a robe on the chair. She is bathed in light and satin, in luxury both austere and filigreed.

A porcine manservant sets down her tray on the veranda outside: Breakfast is for families. She introduces himself and he pulls out her chair, settling a napkin on her lap. This heaven burst from the madness of the imagination; this heaven a reversal of all she's been denied. Soft where life was hard, bright where life was dark. A man who never loved her, and whom she never loved, who always judged and who paid cash for her follies, traded for something better. Maryann appears and sits down with her. "Okay, this isn't food. This is sculpture. And this place... You're not really just a social worker, are you?" Maryann laughs in her

halter dress, saying they're both more than what they appear to be. She offers her coffee, but Tara doesn't drink.

-- Page 9 --

"I mean, you're not just a drunk-driving bartender, are you? You're also intelligent, resourceful. Strong. A survivor." Tara admits she's none of those things, at this point in the story: her story now is ruin, hate speech directed at her greatest and most fragile friendship, a man who called her a whore and never loved her, a car gone, a house and mother vanishing. She's adrift, alone, everyone tied to their own miseries and assuming hers are, as usual, of her own creation. "I suppose that's one way of looking at it. Personally, I see your situation as an opportunity." She sips her coffee; Tara still hasn't tasted hers yet. "I just got a fake exorcism and a DUI, I probably lost my job, all of my friends... And my mother disowned me." It's just a fairytale. "I'm sorry, but I don't get how that's an opportunity." And there is this: whenever the world gets bigger, it always looks like it is ending. That's the secret of the apocalypse: it happens every minute. You inhabit the story, the story that saves you, that holds you softly in its hands, and then the story goes away again. And the world and all its shadows smile, and invite you to come exploring once again: "Come and find out!"

"Maybe life has just cleared out all the things that weren't working. Now you've got room to rebuild. Decide exactly what you want your life to look like, and make that happen." Tara's restless, because it sounds like work. Too much work, a lifetime's worth: to be happy. To take responsibility. To stand in the ashes, to dig a potato from the scorched earth and swear you'll never go hungry again: that you're willing to fight life to the death for what you're owed; for what you owe yourself. To step into the new story, beckoning you forward, saying that all you ever did was let them have the upper hand. Tell you how the story was going to be. Tell you which side you landed on, whether you were worthy of love, or sex, or beauty. Tell you that you have a demon inside you, that you must kill her, that you must wall off your kingdom. Declare bankruptcy only to find that witches have day jobs, too. Because if there is no mother, and there is no crone, then all you have is yourself: under the sun and under the moon, singing the songs you write for yourself. And that's the one place too scary even for Tara to walk alone. The future is a wilderness.

"What do you want, Tara? What do you want your life to be?" Remove the pain, the goad, the fear, the guilt, and what remains? A white page, without music on it, without words. The end of the world. The apocalypse is white, the blankness of a page. "I don't know," she says, knowing Maryann's beliefs enough to feel guilty for her own weakness and helplessness: "I guess I never really let myself want anything." Heartbreaking; Maryann agrees. But Tara still can't see the next page, so she just feels ugly and stupid for wanting something she can't yet name. She stands up awkwardly, promising to pay Maryann back, promising to give back her time to the people Maryann should be helping, the ones that deserve it. Maryann's voice goes a little hard. "Tara, sit down. You haven't touched your food, your dress isn't dry, and I think we both know you've got nowhere to go." Not too hard, not too soft. Just right. Tara feels broken, and at a word eases back into her seat.

-- Page 10 --

When we talk about sacrifice what we're talking about is the fact that there are things moving in the deep: leviathans older than time, twisting in the water. You can feel them when they move past you, or through you; implicit in the sparks that light your skin up. You

give them something, your madness or your desire, and they pay you back in power. Their passage deforms the universe, like Einsteinian ripples in the fabric and curves in dimensions you can't see, but you can feel it. Remember Lynda Barry: "And in my dream there was a creature. Not too friendly, not too mean. He closed my eyes and opened them." And of all the other things there are than vampires, in the world, you must remember this deep magic: Every one of them a leviathan, full of blood and life and magic. Maryann, Pam and Eric; Bill and Sam; Jason and Sookie and Tara and poor dead Eddie, and you and me.

By cross-sums she is woven with the Moon, who stands at the threshold of the darkness and churns the waters. But every guide is the guardian of a threshold, don't forget: from one angle a strange angel guiding you to Heaven, and from another something dark and terrifying. Until you learn to tell the truth; until you learn your true name. In the old days, three men with animals' heads would come into your tent and rip you into pieces, put you back together with a diamond in your head: time enough to obey the Oracle's only demand, *γνῶθι σαυτόν*, the truth that rips itself across your skin and never, ever stops. Tara is brushing past God's lovely face, and Maryann asks her to wait, to sit, to eat, to want. They'd find them, decades older or souls gone, smiling in the sunset, in a circle of toadstools, long after the music had come and gone and the wise women knew it was safe to go outside again: and all the fairy gold in their pockets had turned back into leaves of oak and ash, and all the fairy food in their stomachs was nothing, and they were starving. And the little man becomes a pig again, and the boar becomes a man, and the world ripples in the sunlight and becomes itself again, and all we know of their passage is this: the way their lights have marked us. The sad song in our hearts we can never quite remember, and never quite forget; the song of the night that made us.

"I know it's hard for you to trust me, but I really do just wanna help. Even if that means just giving you a place to stay until you figure things out... It's what I do," she explains again. "It's what I want my life to be, helping people. Not because I feel sorry for you, and not because I want anything back from you." Then why? "Because you deserve a chance. And I'm in a position to give you one." Tara smiles, fidgets; inside, the porcine manservant hears her phone ringing and, seeing it's Sam calling yet again, pockets the phone and prepares the bed for her next rest.

-- Page 11 --

"You wanna end this thing, that's fine. The least you could do is call me back and tell me where the fuck you are so I can stop worrying..." Sookie enters his office and Sam calms down, for a thousand reasons, thanking the person on the phone and saying goodbye. Brother in jail, Bill uninvited from her house: lots of reasons not to rock the boat. To remind her neither that her best friend is missing nor that he has taken a lover. "What are you doing here?" he asks, because she has a million reasons to stay home. "I'm not staying home and hiding, having people think I'm ashamed." Love him or hate him, and I do, Sam Merlotte taught her that. "Besides, I'm gonna need all the money I can get to hire a private investigator: Drew Marshall is somewhere in this town. Who knows how many times he's sat in one of those booths, looked me in right in the eye and ordered a burger and fries." Sam asks if she wouldn't have picked up on that, and she whirls, stressing: "Wouldn't you have *smelled* him? I ain't a shortwave radio, I spend most of my time trying not to listen to people!" Sam apologizes, and she realizes he has no reason to do so. She smiles apologetically, and heads out into her day.

The cops admit a man to Jason's cell. He's neither friend nor family; perhaps he is both. He is given five minutes. Jason isn't interested, thinking at first he's a lawyer. He doesn't want a lawyer: lawyers argue the truth, turn it into something ambivalent, dig beneath the easy shallows and show the dimensions of the world, how up can be down, how clean can be dirty, how killers can go free. The last thing he wants is an attorney, when the only thing attorneys do is bring us closer to the complex truth. An attorney would say, "You did this thing and this thing, but you are not guilty. You deserve the right to a trial, and to the protection of the law. Your murders are not murders. Eddie did not die. Eddie was already dead. You are free." The apocalypse is a single page, stuffed so full with white it screams.

"I'm here on behalf of the Fellowship of the Sun," says Orry Dawson, and bored Jason sits up: "That anti-vampire church?" A contradiction, a cult, a Hurley Burley if ever there were one: how can a church -- a word which means *love* and *home* and *family* and infinite compassion and welcome -- possibly condone hate? How can religion -- a word that means *reconnection* -- possibly preach destruction? It makes his head hurt, fuzzy like a dead channel, and so he rejects it. This isn't follow the leader, this is the price of Jason's kindness and his blind, loving heart.

-- Page 12 --

If you'd told him, even before Eddie, that v-juice opens the doorway to infinite compassion and love, for all God's creatures, he'd be confused by the horror that brings it to his door. If you'd told him the world is full of infinite recombining beauty, all souls connected, all things connected... And yet there are abominations, dead things walking, predators we must destroy, he'd be confused, his head would buzz with the knowledge that your words disagreed with the wordless truth in his gigantic heart. He needed Amy to explain to him how even the principle of inclusion necessarily carries within it the signifier of exclusion: that Gaia is life, and thus excludes death. Even in the face of Eddie's beauty, even when Jason's entire body sang out for the love of Eddie, she told him how both things could be true. And every time he faltered, she reminded him, and told him a new way it could be true. How love which contains everything can and must contain also hate. How we feed our addictions, the needs we can't control, through a radical reassessment of terms. How we take the signs and twist their meanings.

"We are a religious organization dedicated to the preservation and salvation of the human race," says Orry Dawson, and what he means is, "Yes. We hate vampires and have built a religion on it." But what Jason hears is, "Love which contains everything can include hate, but we hate only the sin, not the blighted sinner." And well, that's fine, because it quiets the demons buzzing in his ear, telling his heart that the sun is like anything else: beautiful and terrible, destructive and wonderful, depending on what story you're telling yourself. "Oh, good. Because I thought you just hated vampires. And I used to, but then I got to know one? And he was a pretty decent guy. Until I got him killed."

Orry sighs, almost sadly: "See, that's where you're wrong. What you did, it was a service to your race and to Jesus. And you should be proud of that." Orry weeps for the poor benighted fellow, but understands how Jason can love him and still have killed him. He can see it in Jason's eyes: that guilt, that love. But after all, that's what the Fellowship is about. Love or hate or fear or lust, the sun comes around like clockwork. Jason rolls his eyes at him, but Orry presses the advantage; defines *predator* for him once again: "Last year there were over 800 reported vampire-related attacks, in Louisiana alone." Murders are -- follow me --

committed by murderers. Whatever else the fangbanger strangler is doing, he's definitely committing vampire-related attacks.

-- Page 13 --

Murderers have something wrong inside them, something that takes them out of the running for redemption. And sometimes when a murderer confesses, the whole world rises up, to tempt him away from the truth and the bravery of his confession, to bring him down out of the light and into darkness once again. Jason knows what a predator is, because he is one, now; Jason knows how horrible it is, when their evil deeds go unpunished, especially by the good-hearted and well-intentioned, by the little sisters and the fangbangers of the world, who can't be expected to understand right and wrong any more than a beast that runs in the night. Hard to find a girl who ain't been bit these days. Once there was a little boy.

"And the law won't do nothing about it. They are too busy 'respecting' those fiends and their 'civil rights.' Well, what about our rights? Our rights to be safe in our own neighborhoods, our right to our own blood?" Jason shakes his head, because WTF, and Orry leans closer: "Look. Officially, the church can't condone what you did. You took the lives of four women." Jason nods, sadly. A beast, whose body is a mysterious country, with dark rivers you'll never see, a strange moon that calls in a song without words. "Women who had tainted themselves and their race, but still: human women. Hey." He motions Jason over, and Jason flows toward him like water.

"We do recognize that even though your methods may have been flawed, your intentions were pure." Jason swears he has no idea -- and honestly he doesn't, shooting him that hilarious "Look I really am this stupid" look he gives you sometimes -- what Orry is talking about. But Orry's not singing to him in words. "That's smart. Don't admit to anything." He opens his briefcase and smiles conspiratorially. "The Church has started up a fund for your defense." He passes a pamphlet from the Church through the bars. "In the meantime, here's something to help you pass the time. You are a brave soldier, Jason Stackhouse." Brave, and wise, and kind, and good. A soldier in an army that doesn't hate, but manages to love so fiercely that it burns away all the fear and nastiness, all the darkness of the night, searing off like snow in sunlight.

Jason's heart is too big to write the blank page by himself. He loves too much to do anything on his own. It's not that he wants someone to tell him a story, better or worse, it's that he needs someone to tell the story *with*. His agency is lost and unrecovered. Tell him just enough truth, mix just enough language into your song, and he'll be lost in it: the desire to share in the story overrides his judgment, because he has no judgment. He leaps before looking, but only if you soothe his heart. The story they are telling now rests on the very foundations of what Jason must believe: they both think he's Drew. They are holding an entire conversation based on the untrue fact that Jason is Drew. And it would be a lot harder to believe, if Drew and Jason weren't so close to begin with. Orry Dawson touches his hand, sweetly: like a father, like an older brother. Like Eddie. "God loves you. You will be saved!"

-- Page 14 --

That's the story now: how a murder was redeemed. Not the women, not Gran and the fangbangers, but the real murder. Because there are places where he knows he's not Drew, but even in those places, Eddie's blood is still on his hands, and in his throat. So, make the

world bigger: Tell him it wasn't murder, but love. Tell him hate is part of everything, consumed in light and connected to the living world. Tell him Amy didn't die in vain, but only brought him closer to the light; tell him to love the enemy. Until they are ash.

Tara's insane body at poolside, wearing a tangerine bikini, all alone for all she knows. She giggles, dipping in a toe at first, afraid of pleasure, afraid it's not real, that the gold will turn to cinders and dry leaves. The water ripples out, as she swims. She laughs and splashes, like a little girl. The first little girl, the one who was hurt: that's what Nancy wanted and Lettie Mae never did; she's what Miss Jeanette tried to possess. It's what Maryann wants for her tribute. Breakfast was amnesia, not apology: but Tara hasn't eaten yet. Inside, though, the piggish fairies have upped the ante considerably: food on every table, a cornucopia of delights, squat toroid southern peaches fat with juice, fruit of every kind, from the garden of the world. Lush, dementedly so, fecund and blessed and abundant: the dreams of a child who's spent her life starving: you could expect bees buzzing there in the richness, after all this time with only flies. Too much life after all this death.

In the parlor, a man plays the guitar: soulful with a spark in his eyes, teasing beautiful sounds up into the quiet. He sounds like the food smells, with a quiet face. Tara closes her robe suddenly, shocked out of the garden, and considers him, apologizing. "You must be Tara," he says, and invites her in. He stands and introduces himself: Benedict "Eggs" Talley, full of secrets and a light inside. Benedict, the old betrayer, introduces himself to Tara: the homeland, the territory, the old debated ancestral home, passed from hand to hand. "Suits you," he says, calling it a pretty name. She is beautiful and she is contested. She must not go hungry again. She wavers, imagining that he is Maryann's boyfriend, and he shrugs: he's just like Tara, contested, getting back on his feet. "So collecting stray black people, that some kind of hobby of hers?" Eggs laughs, like a strum, and says Maryann warned him Tara was funny. And what else? What secrets? "She said you crashed your car with a gallon of whiskey in your lap?" They sit and Tara admits it was vodka: "Really cheap vodka." She looks away and down, and he swears he isn't judging her story. "Believe me, all right, when Maryann found me I was..." He stares into the distance, caught in memory and the night that made him. Once there was a little boy.

-- Page 15 --

"Let's just say I was a hell of a lot worse off than you." Back to Tara; he brightens. "She's a miracle worker. You'll see." Tara swears again she won't be there too long, and grins coyly to herself when he says it's a shame. "My Momma. When she thought something was too good to be true, she'd say, 'Satan in a Sunday hat.' That's exactly what this is," she says to his laughter. Eggs knows what she means: it's so hard to be loved, when you've never had much. To sit still for acceptance and compassion when they seem mythological; a family, a story in which you were never invited to star. He begins to play again, and her eyes close softly, and forgets to wonder where her phone is. "You know, it took me a long time to stop looking over my shoulder too. But there are good people in this world. Sometimes... Good shit happens." It is peaceful; she dares herself to believe him as he plays her a song without words. Is she strong enough to believe that the world is big enough for joy? That's the only question they ever ask you, at the crossroads.

The pig snorts, and watches Maryann. She sits in the center of palatial estates, a leviathan moving across the world. She vibrates, the world hums around her; she is synchronized and atypical, a strange attractor. She is many things at once. The universe shivers at her passing, so strong it affects the camera, your cable box, your television screen: her image shivers and

the ripples pass out, and down on the ground her pig watches and remembers: he was taller once. Men become pigs and that's nothing new, but a pig changing shape and size? All men are beasts. Some beasts are men, sometimes. And then Maryann Forrester, holding onto the world like a tender smaller creature; a leviathan passing in the deeps, as you hold your nose closed and chuckle to yourself, all alone like a girl, and dive in. And the ripples move out again.

Without knowing it, Rene sings along: "Devil In Disguise," he howls and hollers, driving Jason's truck just a little less recklessly than its previous owner, toward Merlotte's. Inside, Sookie catches Andy telling a new story, a hero story, the story that saves him. "He don't remember doin' it. Like he had amnesia or something... Now, he's just sitting there, lookin' like a dog that lost his bone. And then he says, 'I did it. I killed those women. You were right all along.'" Bud corrects him gently, but Andy can't hear him. The story has control. "You should've seen the look in his eye. Ice cold. Like he was talking about roadkill." Bud finally leaves the table, and Sookie watches, disgusted, as Rosie the dispatcher squeezes Andy's arm and offers to buy him a beer, to show him appreciation. Rosie, who once wanted Jason Stackhouse as much as anybody else, flirting with Andy Bellefleur, making him a real Detective there with anybody else. This is the mystery he was trying to solve: how Jason, a hero to nobody, somehow earns more love and desire and respect than Andy, a good cop and a swell detective and a hero. How his virility was contested, demonstrated to be suspect, and Andy came out on top. Just as he's always known it would go.

-- Page 16 --

Sookie wavers, listening to the Merlotte's clientele: (*Whole family full of freaks and killers ought to be ashamed to show her face after what her brother did sleazy little manslut Jason Stackhouse a goddamned murderer I'd pay good money to watch that boy fry he was so cute for a murderer wonder why he never hit on me?*) Sam gets to her and shakes her out of it; she wobbles and admits woefully that he was right: she shouldn't have come in today. The thoughts are too much, on top of dumping Bill for the forty-second time and nobody knowing where Tara is, it's all too much. All the defenses she had, and the blessed silence, are gone now. She's a girl in the wilderness again. Sam tells her to rest in his trailer, but she says she'd rather go driving. "I'll keep my doors locked, I won't even get out of the car. I need some time alone, I gotta get these thoughts out of my head." Sam, knowing better but sympathetic to her discomfort, offers to take her tables. She gives him a huge hug and scoots: "Thank you, Sam. For everything." She wanders away, still freaking out; Rene watches from his table, quietly.

She turns the key, afraid even in daylight, but the old car won't turn over. She begs the car, and Jesus, to quit acting up, but it's no use. She begins to shout, pounding her hands on the steering wheel. "Shoot! Darn it! Son of a mother fudge!" She curls herself around it, desperate to leave, afraid of the world, disgusted by the bar, stuck in limbo. And when Rene appears, she gasps, afraid. He takes a look at it, admits he knows little about mechanics, and offers to at least take her home. She's overjoyed, but then remembers she's an endangered species. "I... can't be alone," she says regretfully, wanting out but knowing it's unwise; Rene offers to stay with her until Sam closes the bar. She begs off, but he won't hear it; he ducks his head when she finally thanks him. Terry drives up in his truck, wearing ridiculous orange BluBlockers and hanging his arms over the sill. "Hey Sookie, Rene. I just wanna say... I told Andy, I've known killers, and Jason ain't one." Sookie thanks him, but he means it: "Nobody ever listens to me. But they should." Sookie follows Rene to her brother's truck; Rene slams the hood on the wires he cut before he even came in.

Rene turns up the radio, for the noise, and they talk about Jason, who loves his truck so much. He jerks suddenly toward her, menacing, and pulls out her seat belt for her as he's driving. She thanks him and his creepy smile. After awhile, he asks if she can really hear what he's thinking -- (*What do I think about think about think about nothing nothing think about nothing nothing...*) -- and she tells him not to bother. "Thinking about nothing ain't possible. Trust me, everyone's tried it around me. Sooner or later you'll think about something." Rene's uncomfortable, but even more so when she notes that his thoughts don't have an accent. He changes the subject, and she agrees that it can be hard, sometimes. "You have no idea how sick and twisted some people are," she says, thinking of, among others, Cindy Marshall. "Oh Lord, I can believe that, yes ma'am," he says easily, thinking of, among others, Cindy Marshall. "It's one thing when they think horrible stuff about me. I mean, I'm kinda used to it." Aww. "But when it's about my brother... He's all I've got left. I mean, I've lost everyone..." She makes that weird cry face and he slowly takes a tissue from his pocket, handing it over, feeling bad for her. Once there was a little boy, who wanted to protect his sister from the night itself: "I've lost people too, me. It don't ever get any easier, but ... You find ways to cope."

-- Page 17 --

Among the best ways of coping, as any man could tell you: porn. Lisa and Coby Fowler sit in their living room, mouths hanging open, as they watch Liam take Maudette from behind, chained to the ceiling, praying for pain and for eventual death. Arlene finishes vacuuming and comes into the living room, immediately horrified and scared, screaming at them, begging to know how this came into her house. What she let into her house, with her children, and why. What will happen to them now? "It's Rene's," Lisa says, scared and ashamed. "We found it in the garage." Arlene hustles them out and opens up the toolbox: tape after tape, labeled with the names of men and couples. *A Cajun Dialect For Actors* cassette. Her story was a hard-won happy ending, the only man in the world strong and solid down to his foundations, the only man who could take care of her and of her beautiful, safe children to the end of time. That story ends in horror; it never existed. Her life was about her wedding, and now it is a lie. She invited monsters in; she put silver bangles around her childrens' wrists to save them from the night, but it wasn't the night that came creeping in. It was a monster of the daylight, a man she never knew. Rene dies, in this moment, and a bit of her goes too. Just when you thought they couldn't break you more. All the signs that buzzed by in the blur, that she didn't stop to read. All that vital information that's bringing her down now.

Sookie offers to get Rene some iced tea; it's hot in the house. "Gran used to leave the windows open all day, but I haven't felt safe doing that in a while..." He watches her take off her apron in the kitchen, and turns on the ceiling fan. Last time he saw it, it rained blood down upon the world. In the parlor Sam's gun stands against the mantle. And at Sam's, Lafayette bitches at Rene's leftovers -- "fuckers' palates are as backwoods as their brains" -- and tosses Sam Rene's road crew vest. All evidence of a sudden disappearance, but who would sniff it out? Sam, who takes the vest for lost and found, then smells Rene upon it: the scent of the killer, on Dawn's bed like a song without words. He takes off running immediately; Terry hides his cigarette from Sam for no reason and surmises that she left with Rene "twenty to twenty-three minutes ago," and Sam runs off down the lane, toward his Jeep.

Rene appears from strange angles, vanishing points; he startles Sookie by appearing in the wrong doorway and asking for his sweet tea. He apologizes for scaring her, but the gasp in

this room was too much; Drew's memory gives in. (*Don't think about it blood blood so much blood she wasn't supposed to be here... Shut up!*) He remembers the kitchen, Adele standing up from the table where she read her book, with Tina by her side, outraged and complaining even as he attacked ("How come Sookie ain't here? You weren't supposed to be here!") and Sookie drops the tea pitcher, terrified. Rene, suspicious, doesn't listen to her nervous giggle of apology, and offers to help, coming closer. She moves slowly away from him, toward the parlor, in search of a mop; like a mugging in the middle of the night, on a street, she turns with a soft and scared grin to see him following her, a few paces behind.

-- Page 18 --

In the parlor Sookie grabs the gun, cocks it at him and fires on him as he's smiling, but he shows her the shells he pocketed from the mantle. (*She deserves it needs it wants to die that's why she fucks them fangers...*) She screams once, bashing him in the head just as he's removing his belt for the last time. Out into the yard she runs, squealing to herself, and hurls the useless gun into the bushes. "Get back here, you fucking bitch!" he shouts, bleeding and in hot pursuit, chasing her toward the graveyard.

Cindy was getting ready for work, one of the first of the fangbangers, two years ago: she looked at the marks on her neck and frowned to herself. "Nothing that'll cover up what you done," said Drew. Cindy called him a freak for watching her get dressed, touching a spark. That word "freak," that attraction and repulsion to the night and the strangeness of the larger world, watch for them. They are the secret origin of Drew, and the reason Jason could never have been the killer. Listen. "You're the freak, Cindy. You're the damn freak. Fuckin' freak. Fuck! Spread your legs for a dead man? Mama'd roll over in her grave..."

Rene chases Sookie: "I'll teach you, you bitch!"

Drew took off his belt: to teach her a lesson, in a world without fathers, it falls to our brothers to remind us where the world ends. Where the limits are; to reminds ourselves in the process. And Cindy asked him what the eff he was thinking; shortly after, she was dead, and her brother grieved for her, wept and screamed, and retreated to the sunlight corner of the world where Death has no dominion.

Rene yowls in the sunlight, trying to chase away the Drew memories as Sookie unravels them. "Get out! I can feel you in my head!"

Drew killed Maudette, and that night Rene got so torqued up he had to go visit the Rattrays, to buy some weed. Denise was looking murderous and crazed; Mack bore the marks of the chain from Jason's truck around his neck. It looked like his sister's neck, when he was done. Red and welted and angry. The memories keep coming: Dawn thought he was Jason, back for more. Jason and Drew, Drew and Jason; the first time the killer visited, it was a joke. She turned into Liam for a moment, and Jason turned into Drew, and the shapes shifted around them in the night. Drew put that to rest: "Die, fangfucker!" he screamed. And then Amy, who never even fucked a vampire, but threatened the world nonetheless, more than he could handle. Things have a way of working themselves out. "Stay the fuck out of my head! Fuck!" Rene twists and turns, in a sun-dappled lane, screaming to himself; fighting for Drew's body, to get away from the nightmares.

-- Page 19 --

Under the old Compton house, Bill awakens to Sookie's screams; his eyes dart open and he grits his teeth. Sam runs to the Stackhouse porch: Rene's belt, forgotten; the blood from his head trailing out toward the cemetery. He follows, shedding clothes as he goes; Bill unlocks his crypt and forces himself out into a sizzling, bright world. Every step puts him into the fire. It won't kill him all at once, he won't burst into flame. Love kills slowly. His every step is underwater and in the fire, it beats against him like a beast. The sun stares hatefully through the curtains, but he is strong. He opens the door to horrors of light, screaming in the sun, and does his best to run toward her. Life and Death, werewolf guy and vampire guy, run at them -- the girl and the monster/the little boy and the girl who loved Death -- from opposite directions, to the cemetery between their two houses. It is not only, was never only death between them: the graveyard is where life and death meet, and visit, and weep with grief. It is a crossroads.

Sookie hides herself in an open grave, under the surface, away from the sun. Drew abruptly apologizes, desperate and crazy. "Let's be friends, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. We can be friends! Sookie! Seriously, I was just kidding." (*Can you fuckin' hear me you filthy fucking cunt I'm gonna tear out your throat with my hands and fuck your dead face*). Realizing, perhaps, that this is not the most comforting thing one friend can say to another, he calls on Rene. Rene will speak, will have his turn; for a moment Drew retreats into the shadows, and Rene calls out a song without words and without accent. (*Shit. Goddamn it, I must have lost her. Could be hiding in the woods. I better go back and check...*) She slowly stands in the grave, and Drew jerks her from the cold ground, bashing her head against a tombstone. "Mind-reading, vampire-fucking, freak bitch!" That word again. He strangles her as Bill walks through heaven's fire, toward her fear and pain. What animates us doesn't animate him; sometimes it's magic, but what animates him this afternoon is love. Only love, strong enough to push him through depths of flame, every step torture. "You think you're so smart!" screams Drew. "You smart now?"

Sam leaps upon him from Sookie's side of the graveyard, growling, and buries fangs in his throat. Drew pushes the dog off as he's mauling him, smashing his head in with a stone, kicking him viciously several times before he finally falls unconscious and Sam appears, naked and knocked out. Drew keeps kicking. Listen to his words. "What the fuck are you? You fuckin' freak fuck! Fuckin' sick fuck. Die, you fucking freak of nature!" Not I, but you. I belong here. You don't.

-- Page 20 --

Bill burns, unable to move forward, his face crackling in the flames, in a sunny clearing. He says her name, as he falls to his knees, and her eyes pop open. Their bond is stronger than death and made of blood. Just as Rene is flipping Sam over and lifting a heavy piece of wood to knock his brains out for good, Sookie slams a shovel against his head and he goes down. He's not out, grabbing at her ankle, screaming profanity, and she... totally chops off his head with the shovel. Well, it's not full separation, but close enough. He stops screaming, and Sookie whimpers, staring at nothing, once again too freaked out and damaged and concussed to think. Sam appears at her side, naked, and they see Bill, smoking and hissing in the field. He is burnt, blackened, unrecognizable, southern-fried. Cajun.

Sookie falls to her knees at his side, turning him over to the sound of paper skin, crackling and peeling. He groans with the effort of speech: "I am sorry," he says, and begins to fade. Sookie screams uselessly and Sam finally picks up the charred remains, still running around naked in the middle of the daytime, and carries him to the hole. Sookie sobs mindlessly,

overwhelmed and more heartbroken than anyone should have to be, while Sam shovels dirt over her lover's burnt body. Another in a series of bad days.

Later, much later, Sookie lies doped up on the couch, bruised and nasty looking but clean. Tara leans down to stroke her face as she awakes. "Tara... You look so pretty. Like someone turned a light on under your skin!" Someone did. Two someones, a multitude of someones. Miss Jeanette, to show her the wonder of the moon and the night that made her. Nancy at the drug store, to show her what magic looks like by daylight. Lettie Mae, to hand her the blank page of an apocalypse. Maryann Forrester, to show her all the words that she will write on it. Little broken Tara Mae, who knows her chapter's yet to be written. The maiden, the mother and the crone; the united states of Tara Thornton herself, last and greatest of them all, who's finally heard the first whisper of the world: "Come and find out!"

There is a place in her for all of these, sliding up against leviathans in the dark. There is a place in the world for joy, just as there is a place in Drew Marshall for the good man named Rene, and in Jason for the man he must become; in Amy for all the love of the world. There is a place inside a drug-dealing prostitute transvestite that can introduce you to God, if you are listening, in a single drop of blood. There is a place yet undiscovered in Bill Compton that will know peace, and joy. There is a place in Sookie Stackhouse that is blessed with silence.

-- Page 21 --

Sookie giggles, and Sam tells Lafayette and Tara by her bedside that she's dosed to the eyeballs on pain meds. "Didn't you listen when I said I'd lose my shit if anything ever happened to you?" Tara says, fussing over her, and Sookie is loopy and concerned at once: "Don't lose your shit! I'm fine. Did Sam tell you that he saved my life?" She smiles sweetly, in love with the world. "He turned into a dog and bit Rene!" Sam laughs nervously; Lafayette immediately demands a dose of whatever they've got her on. Sam tries to usher Lafayette and Tara out so she can rest, and Sookie sticks up her chin, on fire with a truth. "Sam. You need to let people see the real you. Because you're kind, and brave." Tara is sad, a little; we give up what we burn. "There's nothing there not to love," Sookie says, and Sam is moved. "Right back at you." She smiles crazily up at him; Tara's face is an eloquent fucking hell already. Arlene comes running in, sobbing, with a huge bouquet, which she pokes like an epee at Sookie while wailing; Lafayette's embarrassed smirk is a thing of beauty.

Bud hangs up and tells Andy the DA has dropped the charges against Andy. Since Jason didn't murder anybody, and we now know that, Andy has no choice but to get bullishly stubborn and defensive. "The marks on Amy Burley's neck match Rene's belt. Or Drew Marshall, whatever the hell his name is. He near about put Sookie in a body bag, we got no reason to hold Stackhouse." Andy throws shit around, a little tantrum, and Rose reconsiders her momentary crush, turning to face the wall. Bud tells him to stop screaming and pull it together, and orders Andy to let Jason out of his cell. This is Andy's hardest day, in the history of days, and since his triumph was built on Jason's back the worst part of it all is how Jason's the one taking it away again. "Get the fuck out of here," he says, slamming the cell door open petulantly, and Jason hops down off the bunk. "Is this some kinda trick or something?" No, Andy tells him, it's a fucking miracle. The light falls down on Jason's face and he looks up to heaven: what to do with this miracle now? He is saved, just like Orry said. There is a place in the world for freedom, but where did it come from, really?

Arlene paces in the parlor, sweating blood and weeping madly, begging for Sookie's forgiveness. Which Sookie would already give, because of how she works and the fact that

Arlene has nothing to do with this, but she gives even more sweetly due to the drugs all up in her. "I brought him around my *kids*. I slept in the bed with him every night and all that time, it was nothin' but lies. I mean, his name? His *accent*?" Total breakdown. "God, you think you know someone... *How could I not know?*" It's written all over her face and always has been, the number of times she's had her heart broken. She's speaking about an entire life, slipping through her hands as the years go by, a life without love. But there's a space for Arlene to find joy, to put her heart back together, just as clearly as there's a space for Terry Bellefleur to remember he's not broken, or Andy to remember he's a man. "None of us did," Sookie says, soft and tender. "Don't blame yourself, honey..." Arlene shouts. "I can't help it! I told you to stay out of my thoughts! Isn't that why you didn't listen in on Rene?"

-- Page 22 --

Sookie speaks slowly, because there are no words for this and she's just recently learned how easily we can do this without even knowing it: "It's like he kept that part of himself locked away in some dark corner of his mind." Every day was a war with Rene, to keep the darkness at bay. Sometimes we lose the fight. "Sookie." Arlene sits down, horribly sad. "I am so sorry. I want you to promise me something, okay? Someday, if I ever find another man. I want you to look inside his head and tell me everything that's in there." Sookie tries to explain it doesn't work that way -- and if she'd seen what we've seen, she would be even more firm about it, because the one kingdom you never want to visit is Terry's pain, which mangles even simple thoughts -- but Arlene doesn't care: "Just promise me, okay? Because I have the worst taste in men!" They laugh ruefully: women, who have loved and been broken. In perhaps the least graceful segue of all time, Arlene changes the subject from her horrible taste in men... To Bill Compton. "Is Bill gonna be okay?" Sookie is shocked back to herself, out of the silence and begins sobbing dreadfully, grateful for the exquisite pain of admitting out loud that he won't. She has lost the ability to believe that he will always come running. She put him in the ground. She and Sam Merlotte helped bury him for the last time. Arlene comforts her, as she falls down into it, drowning.

On the porch, Lafayette tells Sam he's going back to the bar, to "make sure Terry ain't PTSDing all over my clam chowder," naturally, and Sam thanks him for taking charge. "No worries, boyfriend. Because I'm gonna hit your ass up for a raise, soon as they pull them stitches out your forehead." He pats his cousin and tells her to call him, and when they're left alone Sam asks, almost musingly, why she never called him back. She says, honestly, that she got no messages from him -- that when she felt alone, she really was alone as far as she knew, and no number of calls from Sam or Sookie or anybody else came through to tell her otherwise, which gave her space to make a new decision.

"Look, we don't have to talk about this now. Sookie almost died. And she would've, if you hadn't been there, so. I'm glad you were, okay?" Sam's happy for a moment, but remembers to remind her that he was worried about Tara, too. But Tara knows better, because she never got the messages, so she indulges him: "I'm sure you were. You worry about everybody. But Sookie's right, you're an amazing guy." Maryann's car drives up, to take her home. "You deserve to get everything you want. And so do I." Tara kisses Sam's cheek goodbye. "Take good care of her," Tara says, and steps out of the story of Tara & Sam, and into a new one. Sam follows her to the edge of the porch, but jumps back when he sees Maryann. "Maryann, this is my friend Sam. Sam, this is Maryann." Maryann grins at him, fiercely friendly. "Sam, it's so nice to meet you! You ready to go?" Tara heads for the car, and Sam's voice is a quiet, menacing, terrified hush. Deep in the throat, with the hackles up and a million miles of painful history. "What the hell are you doing here?" Maryann smiles at

him, shining and vicious: "Did you think I wasn't gonna find you? Oh... You silly, silly dog." She leaves him with that; he stands shaking long after they've left.

-- Page 23 --

"I should've known," Arlene says seriously. "There were things he liked to do. In bed. That no normal man ever does." Sookie gives a great TMI look off this, but see again, that word, creeping around the edges of Drew's life: "freak." The things he wanted and the things she let him do; the things we do to keep them happy.

Jason bursts into the house, fresh from the station, and throws himself at Sookie's feet. "Jason!" she shouts, delighted, and he hurls himself upon her like a boy. "I have never been happier to see you in my life!" Sookie winces and thanks him, she loves him when he's so sweet, but: "Sweetie, I'm black and blue all over. And you're squeezing me." He backs off, apologetically, and looks up into her beautiful, ruined face for the first time. "Shit! Look what that son of a bitch did to you! I can't believe I gave him my truck." Heh. Arlene is less amused; the tears well up again, but Jason's barely noticed she is there. "If he was still alive right now, I'd... fuckin' kill him again," he says, and the words in Arlene's throat choke her, the goodbye to a whole life she dared to hope she'd have. She excuses herself, and Jason takes a while putting it together. "Oh," he says, almost proud to have figured it out. "Me and my mouth..." Sookie assures him Arlene will be all right eventually. I hope so.

"You know, I was sitting in that jail, and I just kept thinkin' about all the stupid stuff I done..." Sookie gently teases him that it must have kept him busy, but it sails over his head. It did take him a while, after all: "And I know it seems like all I ever think about's myself. And drinking. And chasing women. But that's only because I thought that's all I was good at." Sookie desperately grasps for something else, flailing mentally, and offers a weak "Football?" Jason smiles: "Not good enough for a scholarship. I ain't never been good enough for anything. Or anybody. Well, except maybe Amy." He is sad a moment; she's sad for him. She liked Amy too. She could have loved her. "But she's gone, so... So I was in there, waitin' to die too, and I realized my life wasn't worth nothing. I'd never done nothing worth being proud of. And all I could think to do was to end it." Sookie's horrified, but he ushers her past this particular part of the story as quickly as he can: "No, it's okay! Because then, something happened. Sook?" (A deeply crazy smile; the kind of smile that says "Maybe Jesus, maybe not, but crazy enough it doesn't really matter") "I was saved! I was given a second chance. And now I know that all this... this bad stuff that happened, it happened for a reason." The story that saved him.

-- Page 24 --

Sookie shakes her head, confused, and asks what the fuck he means. How can any of this work itself out to mean anything more than horror? "...I ain't sure yet? But I do know that I'm meant to do something important with my life. And soon as I find out what that is," he says willfully, beautiful and strong for a moment: "I ain't gonna fuck it up." She grins, loving this new Jason, and he kisses her forehead. "I love you, Sook. And I'm gonna take good care of you from now on. I promise." Once there was a little boy.

"How about you just take care of yourself? And stay out of trouble?" Jason begs her not to worry about him anymore, and speeds toward the door. He makes it two steps before crashing against the coffee table, stumbling, nearly falling, but he stays upright; you can hear the smile in the shout he leaves behind: "I'm good!" Sookie laughs as he bursts out

into the night, intent on becoming a man, because she just remembered a very important fact most of Bon Temps forgot: Jason Stackhouse is *totally awesome*.

Lafayette, grumbling to himself again, picks up the garbage someone left beside, not in, the bin, and heavy is the head that wears the insane turban, and why is everybody so nasty when it takes seriously no more effort to open the thing and put the trash inside, and how can you grow up with zero home training... He hears it before he sees it, and whirls: something coming at him, fast as a fanger, fast as any of the ten types of lightning he's called down on himself, and neither filibuster nor a silver cross will save him this time. He scrambles to the top of the garbage heap, screaming for God as he goes.

Once there was a little girl, who told herself she was a princess when nobody loved her and she was all alone in the world. Abandoned by her family, deprived of love, deprived of even the memory of silence. And then one day, when things were darkest, her father appeared to her again. "Daddy. Oh, Daddy. It is you. I found you. I found you. They said you were dead. But I knew you weren't. Daddy. Hold me close..."

Bills zooms toward the Stackhouse place and rings the doorbell nervously. When Sookie shuts off *The Little Princess* and answers, he looks nothing so much as amazed by her. He always looks amazed by her. "You're alive?" Bill, who has learned a bit about irony since we first met him, makes a bashful face. "Well, technically no. But I am healed." He's a bit guilty: for the first time in a hundred years, he has fed. He admits it, adds it to his shame, but she can't even hear him: too amazed by the fact of him, back from the fire once again. She invites him in and shoves the door madly shut behind him, to keep the dream from waking. She holds him so close: she's black and blue, but since when did pain preempt their embrace? He can't hold her close enough. She smiles, because the pain is worth it, and touches his face. He sees her wounds and nearly gasps; she's embarrassed by them, and tries to kiss him, but he pops out his fangs and goes for his wrist, to heal her. She refuses. "Without my blood it'll take weeks for you to heal!" Sookie nods. "I don't care. After everything, I... Just need to feel human right now." Bill, nearly dying from the pain, the evidence, the horror of it: "I failed you," he says, because of course that's how he would see it: she nearly laughs. "You were willing to sacrifice yourself to save me." Bill complains with this and that, if he'd been faster, if it had been cloudier, and she shushes him, calms him, hands on his face: "My life is too short for all that." There is a place for joy on the white page of their lives. He kisses her bruises, one by one.

-- Page 25 --

Two weeks later, the Vermont Supreme Court legalizes human-vampire marriage in the state. "Courthouses will be staying open after dark to accommodate hundreds of couples from all over America." When this was written it would have been tongue-in-cheek, a slight reference to an ongoing agony; nobody could have predicted California a few weeks before this aired. It lends the silly metaphor a bit more silly weight than necessary. Sam turns off the TV, irritated and frustrated, and Arlene -- looking lovely, with hair gathered on her head like a pineapple -- giggles at Sookie madly. "Oh my God, you know what this means? Now you and Bill can get married!" Sookie tells her to knock it off: "This isn't Vermont. Besides, he hasn't even asked me yet. And I don't know what I'd say if he did." Arlene gets very nudgy-winky about it, but Sam decides to whine his way into a whole new octave, killing the buzz.

"You should marry Bill," Sam sasses them. "Hell, I'll even throw you a party. Won't even break the bank, because all you need is a couple kegs of TruBlood seein' as how they don't eat or drink. Bet there's even a vampire band and vampire wedding decorations. Put Arlene's party to shame!" Sookie's hair is back to the wavy, bouncy look that favors her best, especially when she flounces away.

Tara joins Sam where he's madly scrubbing the bar, and counsels a bit of calm. "Maryann says if you want something, you don't wait for it to come to you..." She giggles excitedly like every cult member ever, handing over the secret to everything like it's radioactive. "You demand it! Like tribute, from the world." "Do me a favor, don't quote Maryann to me," he spits, and she just thinks he's being a dick. "Excuse me for giving a damn!" Sam asks after Lafayette, who's been missing since he was attacked at the garbage cans. "This one time Lafayette went to Marthaville for the night? He ended up go-go dancing in Palm Beach for like eight months," Tara snorts. Sam grumbles and bitches about that too, and stomps away; Tara with the light under her skin just shrugs.

Terry and Arlene are left alone, the only parts of a recently happy group of friends. "People disappear all the time, but they're never really gone. The good parts of 'em always stay put." Drew got Rene killed, but there's nothing stopping you, or her, from loving him anyway. It was a tragedy, even if it was necessary; even if he couldn't find his way back. But Terry's talking about her too, and about himself. The good parts are still around: they just need to put them back together. Arlene's really moved: "I hope you're right about that, Terry." The tears in her eyes aren't pain anymore. "Your hair's like a sunset after a bomb went off," he says wildly, and she jumps. "Pretty," he explains, staring at her long after the word has faded from the air, and then abruptly turns on a heel and stalks away. He's so strange, and lovely, and broken; she likes him more than that. Her hands go to her hair and she giggles slightly to herself, feeling beautiful for the first time in a while.

-- Page 26 --

I would say a huge part of the world and learning to live in it is remembering that every time a nuclear bomb goes off, there are really lovely sunsets. Assuming you live through it, and assuming you do your best to keep it from happening again, there's nothing wrong with noticing that. Your life is a book being slowly written, and if we've learned anything from Miss Jeanette and Amy Burley, it's that you can't tear pages out of it. You can only treasure them, learn to incorporate them as part of a book that you love. They'll never be just words on a page, of course, but eventually they can stop being your prison. All stories are worthwhile, just as all lives are worthwhile: but it's our duty to find the worth, and to live it as best we can. All stories change us, and ignoring even a tiny bit of the ones flashing by every second of the day is a price you might be called one day to pay. All signs are vital: we can't disregard them. There is a space in the world for beauty. Let there be light.

"And God said, *Let there be light*," says young Newlin, standing at the pulpit of his father's Church, carrying on his work, in God's name. To love thine enemy unto ash and dust. "And there was light. And even though we stand in darkness today, we shall not fear, for God has given us the ultimate weapon. The ultimate salvation!" Two words for the same thing. He points behind him, to the light pouring down through stained glass, as the congregation calls and responds, filled with the holy light of love. "The sun! And he has placed in front of us a daunting but righteous task." The camera pans across the crowd, their lit up, beautiful faces, the sunlight pouring down on them, washing them clean, and inevitably rests on Jason Stackhouse, cleaned up and nodding, in his Sunday shirt. "We will not falter. We will

not rest." NO! they scream, dressed in their finest; in the breastplate and the armor and the righteousness of God. "Until we have brought God's holy light down on each and every bloodsucking abomination!" There are cheers, and whistles, and Jason jumps to his feet, dancing in the light, nearly weeping with the beauty, shouting it out: "Amen! Praise Jesus!" Young Newlin smiles, terrifying and empty, insane and lit with glory; Jason kisses Mr. Dawson on his head, so full of love and light that he must let it out. So full of a new story.

Tara tells Andy he's cut off, but Andy's still stuck on the glory that was stolen from him, again and again, the heir of nothing he knows yet. "My family used to own this whole damn town," he bitches blearily. "The land this rathole stands on included!" Tara reminds him he no longer owns the rathole, and tells him she's cutting him off. "Join the club." She listens. She remembers what it felt like, falling. "One minute you're a hero, the next you can't get a fuckin' drink." Tara feels wise and expansive and loving; her newfound freedom is like V, she can see what links her to him, and it gives her the abundance of compassion. "I ain't never seen a bird fly so high it don't have to come down sometime," she says, more beautiful than she's ever been I think. He licks his lips, insensate, drowning in sorrow for a thing he can't name. She's wearing a lovely printed dress; the satin plum stripes match her eyeshadow. She's as intimidatingly beautiful as Maryann now. She sticks out in Bon Temps. She's lit from within.

-- Page 27 --

"What's that for?" Andy grouches as she sets up another couple of drinks. "It's your pity party. Only one you're getting from me, so suck it up." Andy thanks her, and she looks at him, and finally understands what it's like to just give. Not to get anything, not even to get off on being in a position to condescend: just to remember that kindness costs nothing and earns everything, that all of us are human and connected, creatures of God, that in our kindness to each other we redeem the lost and broken light in the world and in ourselves. "Don't thank me," she says, wholesome. Whole. "It's just easier for me not to hate you. Hating takes a lot of energy. And I'm saving mine up for all the good shit that's coming my way." She heads into the speech -- "...Because I am a good person, and I deserve good shit in my life..." -- and he cuts her off. "Yeah yeah, put it on a bumper sticker." Tara shrugs winsomely; they clink and drink.

When Sookie drops off his beer and burger, Hoyt Fortenberry sweetly asks what "Vampire Bill" is doing the celebrate the Vermont decision: "Some sort of vampire party?" Ha! The only reason nobody in Bon Temps knows what a dork Bill Compton actually is is because they keep killing the other vampires before they can explain it properly. Sookie's shy, she loves dorky Vampire Bill as much as I do: "Actually, we're celebrating together later." Hoyt asks her to pass on his congratulations, and swears if he met a nice vampire girl he'd be proud to have her on his arm. Points for effort, I guess. I certainly don't think it's a mistake that he's about ten times sexier than usual in this scene, now that Rene's dead and fangbanging isn't a sin anymore, now that his innocence doesn't need to be his primary characteristic; neither is it a mistake that his silver cross hangs aggressively outside his unbuttoned shirt, glinting at the camera the entire time.

Sookie laughs at the thought of Maxine Fortenberry welcoming a vampire daughter-in-law into the fold, which is pretty awesome if you consider the living hell on Earth she'd put a human girlfriend through especially, and Hoyt kind of laughs before a lightbulb as big as the sun goes off over his head, and he stumbles over his own words to get the idea out of his mouth as quickly as possible: "You know yeah I mean does Bill know anybody my age?"

Sookie laughs and walks off, but he's serious. Hoyt Fortenberry. Not a fangbanger exactly, but between his Vitamin-Fortified Whole Milk vibe and giant man-crush on Bill, what do you call it? Fangcourter. Vampgentleman. Whatever is totally wonderful and devoid of yick, and just aching to get destroyed, that's what we'll call it.

-- Page 28 --

Because you know who's Hoyt's age, recently turned, and possibly the only person in Louisiana more excited about vampires than him? Yeah. Bill's playing ragtime alone in his house (of course he is) when Jessica comes bursting in, 100% hotter, 1000% snottier, and having traded her whole Juniper look for something a little more Hot Topic. Pigtails, gum-snapping, fang-baring, short-skirted, gartered and blowsy: Jessica 2.0. "Hi, *Daddy*," she spits nastily, as he stares at her in stark terror. I think I just fell in love with vampire trash.

Eric (sort of Hot Topicky in his own right) and Pam (in a gorgeous powder-blue midcentury nubby Chanel top and skirt) come in on her heels, clearly exhausted in a way that not even a thousand years of immortality could prepare you for. "There are favors? And then there are... *Favors*," Eric nods meaningfully at Jessica. "She is *extremely annoying*," Pam clarifies deliciously. Bill starts to whine and freak out about it, and Eric's like, "Nope, she's your problem. Or you could give me Sookie." There is much fang-popping and dick-measuring, to which Pam gives a luxurious eye-roll, and Bill of course gives in. Eric says after a few nights with "this one," though, Bill might see giving up Sookie as the better option. Pam wishes him a snarky good luck as they desert him, and laughs as Eric Swedishly thanks the skies for sweet freedom from Jessica as their leaving. "So," Jessica says coyly. "Who's good to eat around here?" She pops her fangs out and giggles nastily, and Bill is just *outrageously put upon*. Man, Jessica makes me love Bill as much as Sookie does. Something about that fatherly mixture of appalled, complete confusion and *stark terror* just adds up to delight.

Tara points Sookie toward Andy, who is now seeing double, and when she asks for his keys she gets two speeches at once. "I ain't giving you shit, *Stackhouse*," he says, and (*I'm a failure a pathetic fuckin' loser and everybody knows it just like she said they would be* *she's real happy with herself...*) Sookie is taken aback. Who knew people -- much less Andy Bellefleur -- even listened when she talked? "It don't ever make me happy to see someone in pain!" He's so sad and so incredibly cute right now. "I'm gonna call your sister to come pick you up. *Detective Bellefleur*." That last bit just for him. His face comes over all soft and happy, and he is for a second lit by such joy that he tears up.

-- Page 29 --

Sam comes busting into his office, locks the door, and opens a safe; he begins piling wads of cash into the bag in his hand. Hmm.

Sookie and Tara chase Andy through the parking lot, trying to explain to him that A) the only thing he's driving tonight is Tara crazy, and B) his sister Portia is on her way to pick him up. Andy says he doesn't have his keys, that he left them in the car, but then he can't find his car. "Right here, underneath this light... some son of a bitch stole my car..." They don't believe him, and he goes on another soliloquy about how it's hard to be Andy. "This whole town's gone to shit! Nobody used to go murdering each other, stealin' cars... That's what happens when you don't let a good cop do his job!" Sookie's amused; Tara points away, toward a stand of trees at the back of the lot. "That ain't where I parked it," Andy whines,

but they still don't believe him. The place it's parked is shadowed and overhung, like the jungle is eating it. I would believe him, but then, I know what happens next. The worst thing in the world. As they come closer, there's the beeping of a door ajar, and then a foot falls out. It's been two weeks, but the foot looks fresh, and dead. Clean shaven, masculine but beautiful. Toenails painted on Sam's own bar. Lafayette. "That ain't mine, I swear," says Andy regarding the foot, but they don't hear him. Tara joins Sookie in the very last Perennial Screaming Off Of The Ass that marks the end of nearly every episode, and we fade to black with them still screaming.

Well, that's one way to get us back next year, I guess. As if anybody was going anywhere. I hope you enjoyed this season as much as I did, and I will see you next summer. XOXO.